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ISOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

JS Bach

Six Keyboard Partitas, BWV825-830

Eleonor Bindman *pf*

Delos (DE3597 ② • 159')



Eleonor Bindman's Bach pianism is all about clarity and order. Her strong and assertive fingerwork complements her firmly centred rhythm. Although Bindman cites the late harpsichordist Igor Kipnis's imaginative embellishments as a source of inspiration, her own stylish embellishments prove relatively conservative. Yet Bindman's unquestionable seriousness of purpose often spills over into unyielding rigidity. As a result, the music's dance origins and characterful variety fall by the wayside.

Many pianists, for example, conceive the G major Partita's Corrente as brisk and playful, whereas Bindman's heavy phrasing sucks the music's charm dry. If you think Rosalyn Tureck's *détaché* articulation in the E minor Partita's concluding Gigue or her B flat Partita's Menuets and A minor Scherzo lack humour, you haven't reckoned with Bindman's ponderous, emphatic touch. After Bindman's laborious Toccata in the E minor Partita, I feared for her comparably expansive D major Overture. Here, however, a subtle momentum informs Bindman's gravitas, while a rapt concentration always comes through in her spacious Sarabandes. One must also acknowledge the slow yet intimately unfolding conversational lightness in the G major Partita's Allemande. Yet on the whole it's hard to recommend Bindman's earnest and largely joyless interpretations when Schiff (ECM, 12/09), Perahia (Sony, 7/08) and Hewitt (Hyperion, 6/97) remain easily available. **Jed Distler**

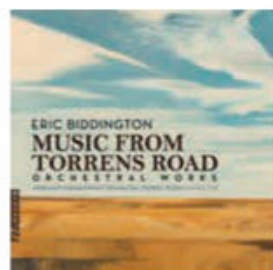
Biddington

'Music from Torrens Road'

Cats of Hillmorton. Classical Overture. Doctor Knows Best (for Anyone and Everyone). Eat Your Brekky (and you will grow big and strong). Homage to Bach. In Geraldine: Small Town Reflections. Sillybuggers

Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra / Rupert Bond

Navona (NV6420 ➡ • 65')



I am prepared to bet that New Zealand-born composer Eric Biddington (b1953)

is as unknown to the majority of this magazine's readership as his music – shown by the seven works collected here – is gentle in expression. The whimsical titles of his pieces give clues to his music's nature overall as much as to the individual works themselves. The keen feline observation of *Sillybuggers* is a case in point, the premise of which all cat-owners will read and say 'yes, that's spot on!'

The 'three impressions' *Cats of Hillmorton* is similarly feline-themed, immortalising various cats of the composer's acquaintance; the opening 'Death of Straypus', with its allusions to the funeral march of Mahler's First Symphony, is nicely drawn, culminating in nine glockenspiel chimes – one for each life. By contrast, the chamber sinfonia *In Geraldine*, Geraldine being a small town south of Christchurch, is a superficially charming portrait of small-town Antipodean life, with darker undertows that only break the surface in the delightfully chaotic (but gently so) finale, 'Sports Day'. *Eat Your Brekky (and you will grow big and strong)* is light music, pure and simple, derived from the well-worn imperative to children.

No pioneer in sound or techniques, Biddington prefers to follow well-trodden compositional paths. The Mozartian *Classical Overture* and *Homage to Bach*, which bookend the programme, do not overdo the pastiche, while the nocturnal central panel of *Cats of Hillmorton*, titled 'Creatures of the Night', is arguably the most advanced music present, 'largely written by Rupert Bond' from an idea supplied by the composer. The gravest work – though it does not really sound so – is *Doctor Knows Best (for Anyone and Everyone)*, its two halves inspired presumably by the final illness of the composer's wife in 2020, when this and all

the other works here were written. Does it expose Biddington's expressive limitations or his essentially positive outlook?

Navona's nicely balanced sound presents the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra's well-prepared, enjoyable performances in the pleasantest possible light. **Guy Rickards**

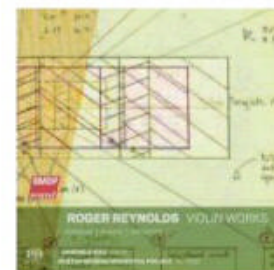
Reynolds

Aspiration^a. Kokoro. Personae^a

Gabriela Díaz *vn*

^aBoston Modern Orchestra Project / Gil Rose

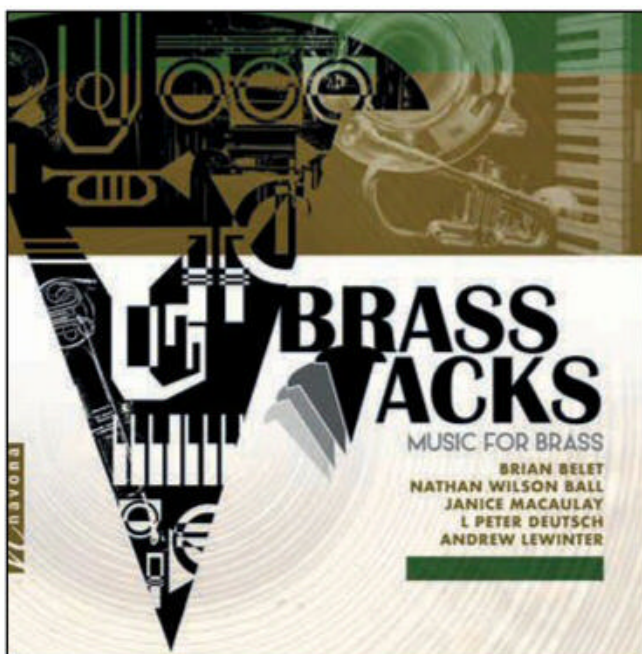
BMOP/sound (1086 • 83')



For two minutes one hears an unaccompanied violin playing jagged short phrases, upwardly slithering long lines and discreetly deployed double-stops. Softly snarling brass chords follow, spiced with quick percussive strokes. The solo violin enters again, with similar yet more agile and playful material. The accompaniments remain somewhat fragmented, yet grow increasingly colourful, where staggered glissandos and wispy arpeggios evoke images of rain falling on glass or paint melting downwards on a canvas. You never know what solo instrument will sneak out from the opulent yet never cluttered textures: a piccolo shriek, an acerbic trombone slide or a strategically placed bass drum hit. At the same time, it's hard to ascertain which of the four sections of Roger Reynold's *Personae* for violin and orchestra you are experiencing in the moment without looking at your playback device, because the music plays continuously.

The 12 solo violin pieces encompassing *Kokoro* also proceed without interruption, despite the music's stop-start nature. The composer subjects the violinist to all kinds of postmodernist gestures, from aggressive fast chords and quicksilver runs in harmonics to asymmetric phrases where widely leaping intervals must suavely connect.

While the six sections of *Aspiration* for violin and orchestra are cut from the same stylistic cloth as *Personae*, the scoring appears thicker and fuller, with more



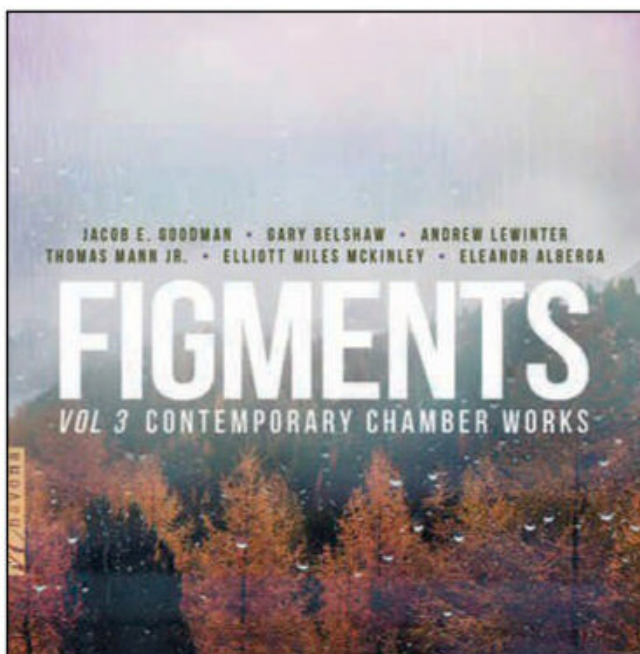
BRASS TACKS

BRIAN BELET, NATHAN WILSON BALL,
JANICE MACAULAY, L. PETER DEUTSCH,
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BRASS TACKS offers far more than the fundamental idioms of classical music. With odd meters, blue notes, ferocious brass writing, and imaginative deviations from traditional song structures, these composers seamlessly push the envelope for brass repertoire.

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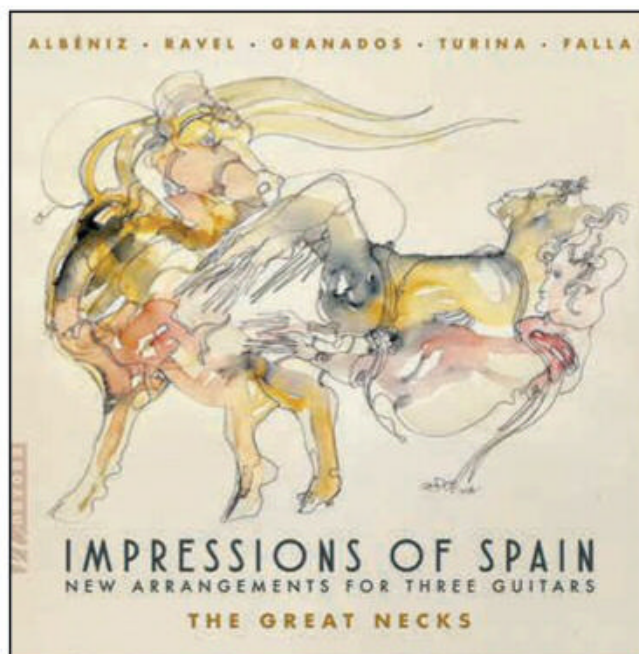
FIGMENTS 3

JACOB E. GOODMAN, GARY D. BELSHAW, ANDREW LEWINTER,
THOMAS MANN JR., ELLIOTT MILES MCKINLEY, ELEANOR ALBERGA

On **FIGMENTS VOL. 3**, the imaginations of six composers are brought to life in a dynamic breadth of emotional performances, from soothing to exhilarating and natural to mythical. Universal melodies and rhythms find their form, short sketches evoke seasonal qualities, and fantasies float into reality in this collection.

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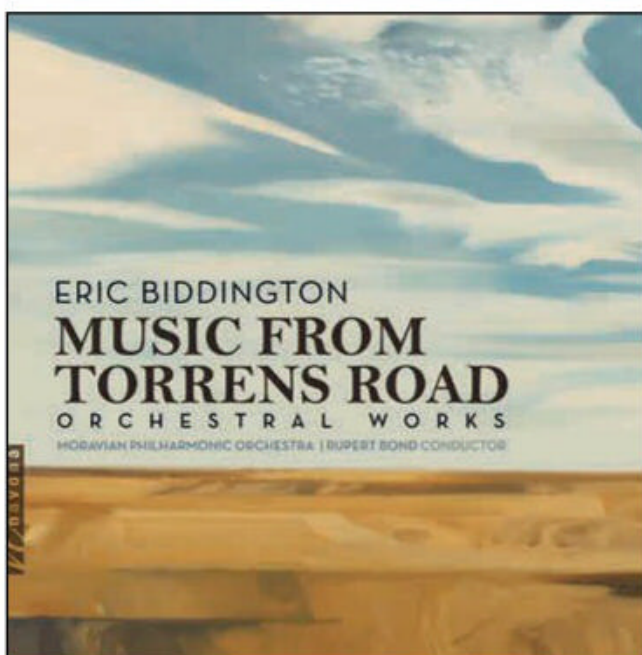
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ERIC BIDDINGTON MUSIC FROM TORRENS ROAD ORCHESTRAL WORKS

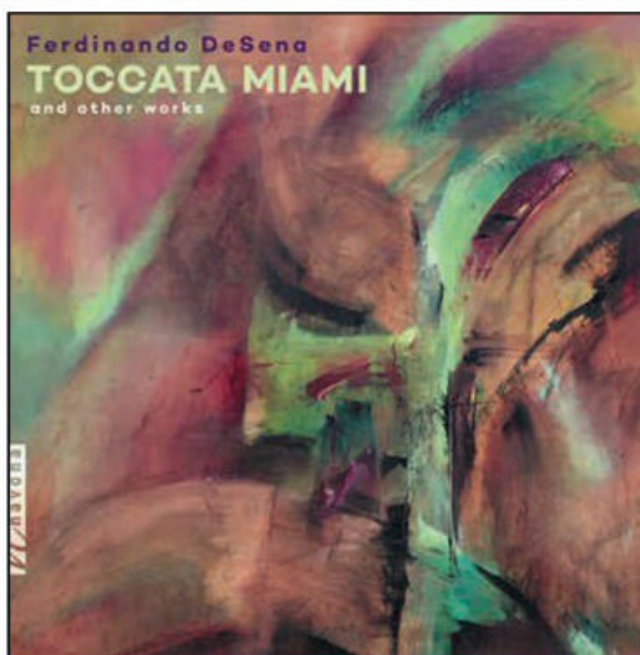
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Ferdinando DeSena TOCCATA MIAMI and other works

TOCCATA MIAMI FERDINANDO DESENA

Composer **Ferdinando DeSena** is no stranger to variation; from his previous electro-acoustic concoctions to this dynamic blend of chamber orchestrations in **TOCCATA MIAMI**, a world of enticing conversation between tonal opposites begs to be uncovered in these expressive compositions.

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SOUNDTRACK OF AN IMAGINARY OPERA REBECCA SOFIA AHVENNIEMI

Rebecca Sofia Ahvenniemi knows a thing or two about blending eclectic ideas. On **SOUNDTRACK OF AN IMAGINARY OPERA**, she toys with established perceptions of music and philosophy, reconciling artificial language and acoustic explorations with deconstructionist ideas, intrepidly leaning into the candid clarity of contemporary music, and with explicit effect.

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Lyrical grace: Jordan Bak presents a daringly introspective programme of works for solo viola, bookended by duo works with piano – see review overleaf

attention to bass lines. Reynolds's music grips your attention moment to moment, yet somehow doesn't lodge into your brain. One recalls myriad colours and textures but not rhythms, and forget about any tunes. What lingers forever in one's memory, however, is the extraordinary virtuosity of violin soloist Gabriela Díaz, the customary point and precision that Gil Rose elicits from his Boston Modern Orchestra Project musicians and the scintillating sound world.

Jed Distler

Summer

Hamlet

Omar Najmi *ten* **Hamlet**
Brianna Robinson *sop* **Ophelia**
Evan Bravos *bar* **Claudius**
Michelle Trainor *sop* **Gertrude**
Kevin Thompson *bass* **Polonius**
Neil Ferreira *ten* **Laertes**
Katherine Pracht *mez* **Horatio**
Dobromir Momekov *bass* **Rosencrantz**
Teodor Petkov *bass* **Guildenstern**
Joseph Hubbard *bass* **Player King**
Melanie Forgeron *mez* **Player Queen**
Andrey Mitev *treb* **Boy**
Maria Anastasova *sop* **Will**
Joseph Hubbard *bass* **John, the Gravedigger**
Emil Zhelev *bar* **Priest**
Chorus of the State Opera, Ruse; Ruse Symphony Orchestra / Leo Hussain

Navona (NV6396 ③ • 3h 22')

Libretto available from navonarecords.com



The American composer Joseph Summer (b1956) is no stranger to opera, having written several comic operas early in his career, nor to Shakespeare, as a series of recordings on Albany and Navona attests. Indeed, for the latter label he has curated 'The Shakespeare Concert Series', which reached Vol 9 in 2020 and features many of his Shakespeare settings. So far as I am aware, Summer has composed two full-length operas on Shakespearean subjects: the present three-act *Hamlet*, completed in 2006, plus the two-act *The Tempest* (2013; issued on Albany in 2015).

Hamlet as an opera is probably best known through Ambrose Thomas's five-acter, premiered in 1868, though the orchestral interpretations of the Prince of Denmark by Liszt, Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich also have considerable currency. Most recently, Brett Dean's searching opera from 2016-17 was produced powerfully at Glyndebourne (and issued on DVD, A/18, winning the 2019 *Gramophone* Contemporary Award). How, then, does Summer's newly recorded version fare in such company?

In some respects it is a remarkably, refreshingly 'straight' or straightforward

treatment. No libretto credit is given by Navona, so I presume that Summer has fashioned his own libretto, and a fine job he has made of it. True, it does not attempt the subtle reimagining of the play that Matthew Jocelyn provided for Dean, but Shakespeare's drama is presented robustly and clearly. There are some imaginative touches: Summer's orchestration is bright and to-the-point, stylistically fairly traditional, Horatio is cast for a mezzo – here Katherine Pracht, suitably robust – and the Ghost, notably absent from the cast list above, is sung by the chorus, as if voicing the outrage of all fathers untimely deprived of life and demanding vengeance from their sons.

The principal roles are well sung, if not remarkably so. Omar Najmi acquits himself well in the title-role, as does Evan Bravos as his nemesis, King Claudius. Kevin Thompson's Polonius is prominent, his strong bass dominating in those scenes he appears in. Brianna Robinson is fine, too, as Ophelia (her portrayal more graduated towards her final unhinged state than Hannigan's in Dean's opera). In truth, though, this is an ensemble performance with no truly standout performances. The Ruse Symphony Orchestra are not a top-flight ensemble so their accompaniment is not always as secure intonationally as conductor Leo Hussain would have liked, I am sure, but they provide sufficient

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support for the essence of Summer's opera to come through. What it needs, though, is a really top-class performance from a top-class company. Until then, this from the State Opera of Ruse in Bulgaria will suffice quite well. **Guy Rickards**

'Impulses'

Clarke Untitled^a **TG Davis Tableau XII Lanzilotti**
Kòu Inoa Q Mason In Memory Mumford
Wending Takemitsu A String Around Autumn
 (arr Hosokawa)^a **Tower Wild Purple**
Jordan Bak *va* ^a**Ji Yung Lee** *pf*
 Bright Shiny Things (BTSC0162 • 56')



For his solo debut album, the Jamaican-American viola player Jordan Bak

has put together a recital of daringly introspective music played with haunting lyrical grace, five works for solo viola bookended by two with pianist Ji Yung Lee.

After Rebecca Clarke's seductive *Untitled*, with its swept scales and kittenish curls, Anne Leilehua Lanzilotti's *Kòu Inoa* creates a meditative haze of *bariolage* bowing between open and stopped strings, before the premiere recording of Tyson Gholston Davis's alternately frantic and sombre *Tableau XII* sets the stage for Joan Tower's *Wild Purple*, a spectacular tour de force, a super-étude. 'I never thought of the viola as being particularly wild', Tower wrote, 'so I decided to try and see if I could create a piece that had wild energy in it.' She succeeded beyond all measure and Bak responds with a performance that rises splendidly

to the gorgeous lyrical centre before descending into realms of impossible virtuosity.

Quinn Mason's moving soliloquy *In Memory* introduces the two last and longest works in the set, both of which operate at deeply reflective levels. Jeffrey Mumford's *Wending* was dedicated to viola player Wendy Richman, a founding member of the International Contemporary Ensemble. Tōru Takemitsu's viola concerto *A String Around Autumn* features beautiful playing by Lee and provides Bak with intimate internal dialogues that enable him to explore the sounds the viola can make when it is played compassionately and with that range of *sotto voce* tone so well suited to his instrument, and including a series of passionate double-stops.

Laurence Vittes

Mechanics Hall, Worcester, MA

Our monthly guide to North American venues

Year opened 1857

Architect Elbridge Boyden

Capacity 1500

Among north-eastern US venues, Mechanics Hall in Worcester is one of the foremost sleeping beauties. After a long eclipse in this medium-size city 40 miles west of Boston, Mechanics Hall – named after a local philanthropic organisation – now enjoys repeat concert visits by high-calibre musicians such as the pianist Simone Dinnerstein and is a favoured recording venue for the likes of Yo-Yo Ma.

Since its 1857 opening, the stately 1500-seat main hall, a model of Renaissance revival architecture, is surprisingly versatile for the 250 or so annual events that are held there, thanks to its flat ballroom-style floor and non-permanent seats. Recordings often have the hall's resident Hamburg Steinway positioned in the middle of the floor – when the space isn't being used as a shooting location for Apple TV's movie *Spirited*.

The main hall's shoebox-shaped interior has what Dinnerstein, who was a year-long resident artist, calls 'an old sound. Some of these new concert halls have a kind of crispness to them. Not the case here.' The warmth is one thing, but the clarity – which is particularly apparent in Daniil Trifonov's DG Bach recording 'The Art of Life' (11/21) – brings an extra sense of intimacy.

Thriving in a city with the cultural metropolis of Boston nearby isn't easy. Forced to choose, touring artists gravitate to Boston. 'However, this has happened the other way around', said the hall's executive director Kathleen Gagne. Examples include the recent six-city duo tour by Gautier Capuçon and Jean-Yves Thibaudet, which included only one north-east US date, at Worcester. With post-lockdown traffic, the local population must be grateful. 'It's 44 miles to Symphony Hall in Boston ... but on some days it can be a two-hour drive,' says Adrien Finlay, executive director of Music Worcester.



The hall is one of several gems in the area, including Troy, New York's 1875 Troy Savings Bank Music Hall (see our profile, 5/22), whose superb acoustics once inspired conductor George Szell to claim he would lie down in front of any bulldozer that threatened it. Such intervention was almost necessary when Mechanics Hall had been in decline – having taken to hosting sports events such as sumo wrestling – along with the city's overall economic status. The breaking point came in 1977, when the choice was either to tear it down or fix it up. The former option looked most likely. 'I am told it came quite close to demolition,' Finlay tells me.

Instead, the city invested in its historic asset, as well as in a steady stream of improvements since, including the restoration of the building's smaller Washburn Hall (1991), a new facade (2002), the addition of an organ concert series (2009) and restoration of the organ itself (2013). Other halls are opening in college campuses in the area, but the local public realises that Mechanics Hall regularly brings international ears to Worcester through the award-nominated recordings that are made there. Said Dinnerstein: 'They value its presence in the world today.'

David Patrick Stearns

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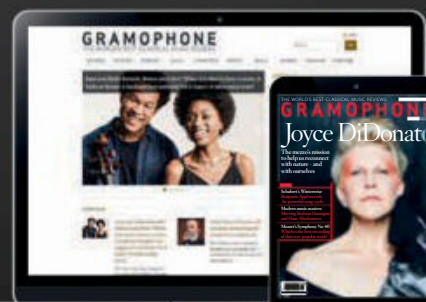
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A LETTER FROM *Dallas*

Scott Cantrell is pleased once more to be able to attend musical events across this Texan metropolis



The Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, as it's called, experienced quite a rebirth of opera in the first months of 2022. Given ongoing uncertainties with Covid-19 infections and travel restrictions, the Dallas Opera postponed staged productions until February, and then compressed the presentation of four operas into two months. There were contributions as well from Fort Worth Opera, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and the University of North Texas School of Music.

Prize of the Dallas Opera offerings, at the Winspear Opera House, was Jonathan Dove's *Flight*, in a vivid Kristine McIntyre staging that missed none of the opera's humanity or humour. Abigail Rethwisch delivered the Controller's flights of vocal fancy with a soprano of impressive power and beauty, while John Holiday's Refugee served up a strong and finely focused countertenor. The rest of the cast maintained excellence, and music director Emmanuel Villaume managed rhythmic complexities and subtle atmospheres with a sure hand.

The other three operas were less compelling. In *Madama Butterfly*, neither Latonia Moore's Cio-Cio-San nor Evan

LeRoy Johnson's Pinkerton was ideally cast, and there was no chemistry between them. Nor was there anything really compelling about *The Pearl Fishers*, framed by fashion designer Zandra Rhodes's cartoon-Matisse vegetation. In a generally clueless staging, upstage choreography during the famous duet was particularly misguided. *The Barber of Seville* suffered from a surfeit of slapstick muggings, scurries, leaps and lurches, and none of the singing, capable as most of it was, quite thrilled.

In January baritone Benjamin Appl and pianist James Baillieu gave a gripping performance of Schubert's *Winterreise* in the excellent 750-seat Moody Performance Hall. With a mix of blazing drama and intimate half-lights, they dug deep into the doomed traveller's very nerve endings.

For 2022-23 the opera company has announced a season of *Rigoletto*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Das Rheingold* and *Così fan tutte*, plus a showcase concert with orchestra for participants in the annual Hart Institute for Women Conductors.

It was widely considered a coup when the Dallas Symphony Orchestra landed Fabio Luisi, a veteran conductor acclaimed in both opera and symphonic music, as its music director, starting in 2020. After adapting to pandemic challenges with chamber-orchestra programmes in 2020-21, the orchestra resumed full forces in autumn 2021. After often muscular performances under predecessor Jaap van Zweden, Luisi is coaxing finer nuances, but his operatic experience certainly comes through in dramatic scores.

His appointment came with a promise of operas in concert, and in April he led a semi-staged *Eugene Onegin* at the Meyerson

Symphony Center.

Directed by Alberto

Triola, the singers physically

interacted on the stage extension, but there were no pistols or other suggestions of the pivotal duel. Lensky just stood there after he was supposedly shot dead, a dancer pulling a red streamer out of his jacket.


Both vocally and dramatically, Nicole Car was a dream of a Tatyana. Étienne Dupuis was the aptly arrogant Onegin, with a big, brassy baritone. Pavol Breslik was the hothead Lensky, his powerful tenor a little too relentless before relaxing into some lovely quiet singing. Luisi's deep feeling for the score was everywhere evident in the orchestra's balance of high drama and delicate intimacies.

No opera is planned for the DSO's 2022-23 season, but a complete Wagner *Ring* in concert has been announced for 2024.

Fort Worth Opera has struggled for vision and stability in recent years, and the pandemic added challenges. The company presented varied vocal programmes in alternative

settings before mounting two staged productions starting in January. The world premiere of *Zorro*, portraying the legendary vigilante with music and libretto by Héctor Armienta, was given with guitar and piano accompaniment in place of the planned orchestration. A slimmed-down *La traviata* was the company's first presentation since 2019 in the city's main venue, Bass Performance Hall. I didn't see either, but my colleague Tim Diovanni reported some fine singing in both.

In Denton, 35 miles north of Dallas, the University of North Texas has the area's largest music school. In February it put on a gripping concert performance of Verdi's *Otello*, which I sampled via livestream. Apart from Carl Tanner, who brought a heroic but finely finished tenor to the title-role, the cast was filled with university faculty and students. Jeffrey Snider's rich baritone was almost too luxurious for the evil Iago. With a potent but expressive soprano, Molly Fillmore incarnated Desdemona's innocence amid the conniving around her. Led by David Itkin, the school's director of orchestral studies, the pacing was savvy, the overall orchestral playing quite accomplished.

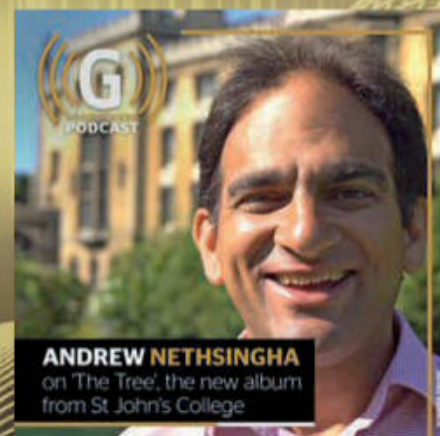
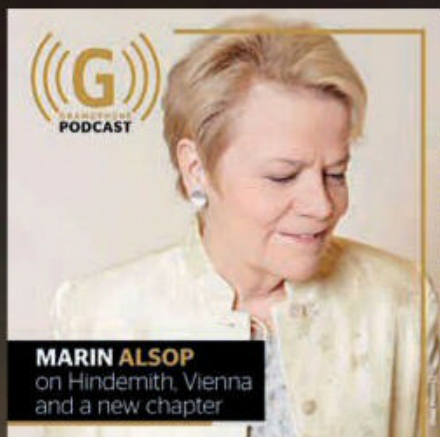
Beyond opera, Fort Worth again hosts the quadrennial Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in June. Delayed by a year by the pandemic, it is bringing 30 pianists between the ages of 18 and 30 for four rounds, including concerto performances with the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra under Nicholas McGegan and Marin Alsop. Prizewinners get cash awards and – maybe even more valuable – career management. 



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From studios to stories: some new article ideas

Last month many of us from across the global classical music industry assembled in Hanover for the annual Classical:NEXT conference. I say annual, but the event didn't happen for the past two Covid-impacted years, at least not in person, so it was wonderful to catch-up with old friends, and to take stock of how much has changed – and how much has stayed the same. I've covered many recent changes in this column, from the ever-impressive developments in sound-reproduction technology such as Spatial Audio, to the exponential growth in digital concerts. As to what's stayed the same: an insatiable thirst for offering audiences, whatever medium they're using, inspiring interpretations of repertoire old and new. Commitment in so doing seemed undimmed, and if anything, to shine brighter than ever.

This issue, we've also made a few changes. Some you may not immediately spot, and one such lies in the titling information that sits above every review. We've received a fair amount of correspondence recently regarding price codes – the symbol indicating whether an album is full-, mid- or budget-price, and where the levels are set – and it became clear that we needed to rethink how useful this information is now. After much discussion, we concluded that with rising – and variability of – prices and the fact that many of you listen via subscription streaming services, the answer was 'not very', so we'll no longer include them.

As to what we've added, a new monthly feature called Carte Blanche will see our Editor-in-Chief James Jolly range widely across the ideas and experiences that



M. Cullingford

shape the lives of listeners and artists alike, meeting some of the most significant figures from either the stage or behind-the-scenes, present and past, sharing stories or exploring ideas. He begins this month with the much-loved mezzo Dame Felicity Palmer.

Also towards the front of the magazine you'll find a focus on a recording venue. From purpose-built studios to suburban churches with prized acoustics, we'll be talking to engineers and artists about the crucial contribution made by the space in which albums are made. A new-style 'What Next ...' will offer avenues of exploration inspired by core works, while in a Q&A feature we'll catch-up with a leading performer each month to explore something significant happening in their creative life. Finally, leap to the back, and you'll find a new addition to the audio pages which should prove highly-helpful reading: a monthly guide to a key area of equipment. We start with turntables, which have seen a renaissance in recent years thanks to the so-called vinyl revival: a product that ties together trends of today with practices of the past.

Which brings us neatly back to where we began: some things change, and others stay the same. And most importantly, what remains is that across reviews, interviews and other articles we'll continue to offer you the very finest writing on classical recording, and I'd like to offer my heartfelt thanks to all our authors – and, as we approach our centenary, all those who across the many decades have helped shape *Gramophone* into the title it is today – for the invaluable insight they bring us.

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'I can trace my life through John Williams's film scores, starting with *Jaws* which I saw in 1975 when I was 12,' recalls

ANDREW FARACH-COLTON, writer of our cover story which explores the composer's music beyond the cinema. 'And now, having immersed myself in his concert music, I feel an even deeper connection to this composer's genius and humanity.'



'It was fascinating to talk to Freddie De Tommaso and discuss his swift trajectory to tenor stardom,' recalls writer

HUGO SHIRLEY, a regular *Gramophone* expert on the voice and the author of this issue's interview with the fast-rising Decca artist. 'It's especially remarkable given that only a few years ago he was still studying to become a baritone.'



'Many years ago, it was Bertrand Chamayou's Liszt-playing that first drew my attention to this wonderful musician,' says

TIM PARRY, who writes this issue's feature on the French pianist, focusing on his new album of Messiaen's *Vingt Regards*. 'Time spent in his company is always stimulating, and his generous spirit seems to extend to whatever he talks about.'

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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BRYN TERFEL

SONGS AND ARIAS

OCTOBER TOUR 2022

SATURDAY 01 OCTOBER

ABERDEEN
MUSIC HALL

SUNDAY 09 OCTOBER

BIRMINGHAM
SYMPHONY HALL

SUNDAY 23 OCTOBER

NORTHAMPTON
ROYAL & DERNGATE

SUNDAY 02 OCTOBER

GLASGOW
ROYAL CONCERT HALL

FRIDAY 14 OCTOBER

MANCHESTER
BRIDGEWATER HALL

FRIDAY 28 OCTOBER

POOLE
LIGHTHOUSE

SATURDAY 08 OCTOBER

LLANDUDNO
VENUE CYMRU

SATURDAY 22 OCTOBER

BATH
FORUM

SATURDAY 29 OCTOBER

CARDIFF
ST DAVIDS HALL



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JULY RELEASES



RECORDING OF THE MONTH

HAYDN

Complete Piano Trios, Vol. 1
Fischer: one bar wonder

Trio Gaspard

After more than a decade of immersion in these works, Trio Gaspard embarks on a complete survey of Haydn's piano trios. Each volume is designed as a stand-alone programme and each will feature a new work commissioned to reflect on one of the original trios – in this instance, *one bar wonder* by Johannes Fischer.

CHAN 20244



LOUIS LORTIE PLAYS CHOPIN, VOL. 7

Louis Lortie

Louis Lortie's Chopin series has been praised for 'Chopin playing of sublime genius' (*Fanfare*) and as 'distinguished by... humanistic, selfless music-making, devoid of sentimentality' (*Gramophone*). Volume 7 explores Chopin's 'nationalistic' style.



REVOICED

Corvus Consort | Ferio Saxophone Quartet | Freddie Crowley

The Ferio Saxophone Quartet and Corvus Consort combine forces in this fascinating collection of Renaissance, baroque, and contemporary works, all arranged for this album by the composers themselves or by Freddie Crowley.

ALREADY AVAILABLE



JOHN IRELAND ORCHESTRAL WORKS

Sinfonia of London | John Wilson

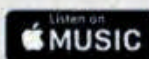
John Wilson and Sinfonia of London turn to the music of John Ireland: the disc includes the overture *Satyricon*, *A Downland Suite*, and the symphonic rhapsody *Mai-Dun*.



VAUGHAN WILLIAMS ORCHESTRAL WORKS

Celebrate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Vaughan Williams with this reissue of the first complete recording of the symphonies in Surround Sound. The box set, at budget price, includes radio interviews with Ursula Vaughan Williams, Barbirolli, Boult, and the composer himself.

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STAY IN THE KNOW



GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RAVEL

Piano Concertos.
Songs
Cédric Tiberghien *pf*
Stéphane Degout
bar Les Siècles /
François-Xavier Roth
Harmonia Mundi
► **HARRIET SMITH'S
REVIEW IS ON
PAGE 40**

An album that wonderfully reveals Ravel's originality; richly coloured pianism, performed on a beautiful sounding 1892 Pleyel, is echoed in Les Siècles's period playing and Stéphane Degout's songs.

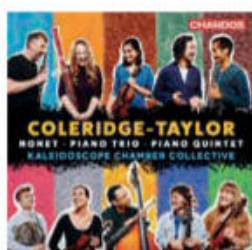


SIBELIUS

Symphony No 7 etc
Finnish Radio
Symphony Orchestra /
Nicholas Collon
Ondine

A Sibelius programme prepared with deep thought, a powerful reading of the final symphony sitting perfectly with the two accompanying suites.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 51**



COLERIDGE-TAYLOR

Chamber Works
Kaleidoscope Chamber
Collective
Chandos

Three works written by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor aged 18, hardly heard until recent years, but given splendid advocacy by the ever exploratory Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 57**



'ALTER EGO'

David Orlowsky *cl*
David Bergmüller *lute*
Warner Classics

An unexpected – and unexpectedly beguiling – album that blends the voices of the clarinet and lute together with extraordinary success, in a manner as mysterious as it is riveting.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 62**



BOLCOM

The Complete Rags
Marc-André Hamelin *pf*
Hyperion

A completely triumphant – and entirely authoritative – survey of William Bolcom's rags, performances filled to the brim with all the character these glorious pieces require.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**



MESSIAEN

Vingt Regards sur
l'Enfant-Jésus
Bertrand Chamayou *pf*
Erato

A deeply spiritual journey through a deeply spiritual work, a highly personal project by our recent Recording of the Year-winning pianist, and one you can read more about on page 28.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**

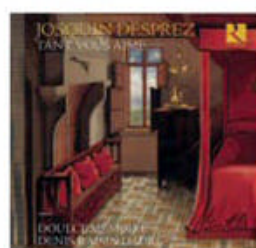


CHAMPION

Missa de Sancta
Maria Magdalena
Cappella Pratensis /
Stratton Bull
Challenge Classics

A fascinating exploration of performance practice and the role of improvisation in early music, but most important of all, the resulting recording is strikingly splendid.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**



JOSQUIN

'Tant vous aime ...'
Douce Mémoire /
Denis Raisin Dadre
Ricercar

The atmosphere and sound world created by Douce Mémoire's gloriously presented performances of Josquin songs instantly transports us to an era far from our own.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**



'BATTLE CRY - SHE SPEAKS'

Helen Charlston *mez*
Toby Carr *theorbo*
Delphian

Helen Charlston has crafted a superb programme of music old and new which perfectly plays to her strengths, greatly enhanced by the rapport shared with theorbo player Toby Carr.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 84**



'PHRASES'

Héloïse Werner *sop*
Delphian

One of the most imaginative talents among today's young generation of singers and composers, Héloïse Werner's debut solo album explores language via vocal virtuosity, humour and heartfelt music-making.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 85**



DVD/BLU-RAY MONTEVERDI

Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria
Sols; Accademia Bizantina / Ottavio Dantone
Dynamic

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 93**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE

'THE ART OF DUO-PIANO PLAYING'

Pierre Luboshutz, Genia Nemenoff *pfs*
Marston

The piano partnership of Pierre Luboshutz and Genia Nemenoff presented with all the care and attention to detail that collectors of releases from the Marston label have come to expect.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 73**

FOR THE RECORD

Plínio Fernandes joins Decca

Decca Gold has signed Brazilian classical guitarist Plínio Fernandes. The first album from the partnership will be a solo recital entitled ‘Saudade’ – Brazilian for nostalgia – released on July 8, and with repertoire ranging from Villa-Lobos’s Five Preludes to *The Girl From Ipanema* by Antônio Carlos Jobim. The opening track, *Assanhado* by Jacob do Bandolim, is already available to stream.

According to the 27-year-old, ‘All my heroes recorded for the label, especially Andrés Segovia. Being the one chosen to carry through that legacy is amazing,

but such a responsibility.’ The programme he’s assembled features ‘songs that I grew up listening to ... and in many cases I fell in love with the guitar through them.’

Born and raised in São Paulo, Fernandes studied at London’s Royal Academy of Music, where he received his Master’s degree, and is now London-based. He is joined on the album by Sheku Kanneh-Mason (with whom he collaborated on a track on the cellist’s Elgar album) and violinist Braimah Kanneh-Mason, as well as by singer Maria Rita.



Pentatone’s new San Francisco home

Pentatone, a former *Gramophone* Label of the Year and home to leading artists as diverse as Alisa Weilerstein, Sean Shibe and Semyon Bychkov, has found a new home in America: the San Francisco Conservatory of Music (SFCM).

The new partnership follows the acquisition in October 2020 by SFCM of the management company Opus 3 Artists; according to a statement, the organisation hopes that the trio will ‘present an innovative platform to reimagine the model for professional music education and to invent the performance experience of the future’.

Though Pentatone will continue to operate as an individual company, its artists will have access to SFCM’s state-of-the-art recording facilities, and the label’s team will participate in on-

campus projects with students resulting in the release of an album. One of the first fruits of the collaboration will be a recording by the National Brass Ensemble during Summer@SFCM’s National Brass Ensemble Academy, conducted by San Francisco Symphony Music Director Esa-Pekka Salonen.

Sean Hickey, who joined Pentatone as its Managing Director in April, says the partnership ‘affords us the potential for meaningful collaboration in the areas of higher education, recorded music, and music management and the shared resources that we hope to enjoy as a result. The record industry is changing drastically and now is a good time for one of the largest and most-celebrated independent classical labels to forge deeper and more strategic partnerships.’

Arise Sir Stephen!

Stephen Hough, pianist, composer, author and *Gramophone* Award-winner, has been knighted in the Queen’s Birthday Honour’s List 2022. One of the most admired and beloved of British cultural figures, Hough’s career has embraced 70 recordings, eight *Gramophone* Awards (including for the Gold Disc-winning set of Saint-Saëns’s piano concertos), and 29 Proms appearances. He was also the first artist to broadcast from Wigmore Hall following the venue’s forced Covid closure, an event audiences worldwide will remember as a deeply moving one. As a composer, he has written for both Westminster Abbey and Cathedral, the Cliburn Foundation, the Takács Quartet and many others. *Rough Ideas: Reflections on Music and More* won a 2020 Royal Philharmonic Society Award, and his memoir *Enough: Scenes from Childhood* will be published by Faber in spring 2023.



Yo-Yo Ma honoured

The Birgit Nilsson Prize has been awarded to Yo-Yo Ma. Given every three years to an artist or institution whose contribution to classical music has significantly shaped the art form and its place in society, the prize, worth \$1m, is also classical music’s largest.

The President of the Birgit Nilsson Foundation, Susanne Rydén said: ‘In today’s challenging and ever-evolving world, when classical music is too easily marginalised, Yo-Yo Ma embodies everything that Birgit Nilsson wished for in a fellow-artist when she created this Prize’. The cellist follows previous recipients Nina Stemme, Riccardo Muti, and the Vienna Philharmonic – and the first, chosen by Nilsson herself, Plácido Domingo. *Gramophone* spoke to the cellist about receiving the prize – see page 13.

PHOTOGRAPHY: REBECCA NAEN, SIM CANETTY-CLARKE

The Van Cliburn is underway!

Competitions have long been important in showcasing for both audiences and the music industry alike the most impressive talent within the younger generation – and the imaginative embrace of online streaming by many of the major events has made it easier than ever before to follow the excitement. One such event is the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition which – if you're quick – may still have a week to run (and if you're not so quick, is available to watch on catch-up). Running until June 18 in Fort Worth, Texas, it's among the most prestigious piano competitions, and since its launch in 1962 has produced an impressive roll call of recipients across its medals, including such artists as Radu Lupu, Cristina Ortiz, Barry Douglas, Beatrice Rana – and, in its last outing, the 2017 winner Yekwon Sunwoo.

A global line-up of 30 competitors started the competition this year, hoping to progress through to the final on June 18 – and thus hoping to impress



The 2017 winner Yekwon Sunwoo performing in the final round, with Leonard Slatkin conducting

a jury that boasts such names as Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, Stephen Hough and Marin Alsop, the jury's chair.

Gramophone is delighted to be a Media Partner of the competition, and as part of that is publishing a daily blog by our piano expert Jed Distler, who will be watching proceedings unfold: simply log on to gramophone.co.uk to find out more. And you can follow the action for yourself by visiting cliburn.org (where you can also cast your vote for the winner of the Carla and Kelly Thompson Audience Award), medici.tv or YouTube. And look out for next month's magazine, where we'll bring you the results.

ONE TO WATCH

Charlotte Saluste-Bridoux Violin

In her review of Charlotte Saluste-Bridoux's debut album, critic Charlotte Gardiner begins by highlighting the young French violinist's distinctive and individual voice. Listen to the recording – as she urges you to do – and you'll not only encounter that, but an equally distinct and bold approach to programming too. Not for Saluste-Bridoux the more familiar and safer ground of a sonata or concerto debut; she's instead compiled an album of highly exposed – and highly virtuoso – solo repertoire from a diverse list of composers: Bacewicz, Bartók, Biber, Prokofiev and Ysaÿe.

The rest of her performance repertoire looks just as individual, including rarely heard concertos by Panufnik, Vasks and Joachim. It's therefore no surprise to find that she was taught by Alina Ibragimova, a fearless violinist and one whose recordings regular demand attention (and often accolades) in our pages, and with whom she completed her Master's degree at London's Royal College of Music.

Saluste-Bridoux is the current YCAT Ann Driver Trust Artist. She's also a committed chamber musician, and leader of the Quatuor



Confluence, which is tutored by the former Quatuor Ébène viola player Mathieu Herzog (another *Gramophone* Award-winner), and which in 2021 won First Prize at the Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition. It will be fascinating to see where this exploratory artist turns next, but in the meantime do catch her impressive debut, called 'Ostinata' and issued on Champs Hill Records – and read our review on page 74.

GRAMOPHONE *Online*

The magazine is just the beginning. Visit gramophone.co.uk for ...

Podcasts

This month on the *Gramophone* Podcast we feature fascinating interviews with countertenor Jakub Józef Orliński, violinist Anne Akiko Meyers, tenor Cyrille Dubois and mezzo Helen Charlston. Orliński talks about his new album, 'Farewells', which features a selection of Polish art songs that ranges over two centuries by Karel Szymanowski, Henryk Czyż, Stanisław Moniuszko, Mieczysław Karłowicz and Tadeusz Baird.



Mezzo Helen Charlston on the Gramophone Podcast

Anne Akiko Meyers's new album, 'Shining Night', takes listeners on a musical journey through the passing of a day – via Villa-Lobos, Bach, Leo Brouwer and even Elvis – and featuring duets with guitarist Jason Vieaux. Cyrille Dubois, with his regular piano partner Tristan Raës, has recorded the complete songs by Gabriel Fauré, and he discusses the composer's music with James Jolly. Helen Charlston has recorded her first entirely solo album for Delphian, for which she was joined by the theorbo player Toby Carr. 'Battle Cry: She Speaks' combines music of the 17th century with a new work written for her by Owain Park, 'Battle Cry', which gives the album its title. All episodes are free to download.

STUDIO PROFILE

Henry Wood Hall, London

In the first of a new monthly series exploring recording venues, **Tim Parry** takes us on a tour of a location prized for its fine and flexible acoustic

Just 100 metres from the bustle of Borough High Street – the main road running south from London Bridge station – is the conservation area of Trinity Church Square, the location of one of the most versatile and popular recording venues: Henry Wood Hall.

In the early 1970s, the London Philharmonic and London Symphony orchestras were searching for a permanent rehearsal space, and one of the prime candidates was the dilapidated Holy Trinity Church, built in 1824 but declared redundant in 1968. The space needed to be suitable for recording as well as rehearsing, and the church was recognised for its excellent acoustics and peaceful setting. Just as renovation began in 1973, the building was gutted by a fire that left only the tower and the outer walls intact – the roof timbers had collapsed – and an almost total reconstruction was required.

A substantial donation from the Henry Wood Fund, itself established as part of the shelved plans to rebuild the Queen's Hall after Second World War, led to the building being renamed Henry Wood Hall. On June 16, 1975, an inaugural concert was given by members of the London Philharmonic and London Symphony orchestras to an invited audience. Since

then, this venerable building has been the focus of constant musical activity, as a rehearsal space for London orchestras and chamber musicians, and as a recording venue for music ranging from the *bel canto* of Donizetti's *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra*, with David Parry conducting an all-star cast and the Philharmonia (Opera Rara, 2/97), to Bach's Cello Suites in Steven Isserlis's *Gramophone* Award-winning account (Hyperion, 7/07). The list of musicians who have recorded here reads like a roll call of the greatest singers and instrumentalists of the second half of the 20th century.

The interior space contains a mixture of materials: a wooden floor, and stone walls with huge velvet curtains that can be drawn beyond the windows to cover or expose expanses of this stone surface as desired. This enables great flexibility in the acoustic – a livening or dampening of the sound. There are two control rooms. The old pews that survived the fire were utilised in the restaurant in the crypt.

For recording engineer David Hinitt, the hall benefits from a sound that is 'both versatile and neutral'. He elaborates: 'It's like a blank canvas that you can work with to shape the sound you want. The high roof and overall space means the sound never gets saturated, and you can place



the microphones a little further away than is often the case.' The main challenge of the venue, Hinitt says, is a roof that sometimes creaks as it cools down, although of course many such venues have to deal with occasional extraneous noises, from chirping birds to passing traffic.

Recording producer Andrew Keener has worked at Henry Wood Hall more than almost anyone. 'Not all recording venues are run by people who understand the needs and foibles of musicians and recording teams,' he says. 'Managers Charles Strickland and Andy Stevens (respectively an ex-orchestra librarian and an ex-orchestra stage manager) do. The feel of the place is both rigorously professional and homely. This understanding is so important, affecting the working atmosphere, not least in chamber or solo sessions that can extend well into an evening with no complaints. The crypt is set out with a food counter and tables. It's all very relaxing.'

Carlos Simon signs with Decca

The US composer has joined Decca, their first release being *Requiem for the Enslaved* – a 50-minute work drawing on the Requiem Mass and African American spirituals and with text by spoken-word/hip-hop artist Marco Pavé. Released on June 17, it was commissioned by Georgetown University following its student body's

decision to establish a reparations fund to be paid to descendants of 272 enslaved people sold by the university's founders to avoid bankruptcy.



New Generation 'ones to watch'

It's always worth keeping an eye out for the new additions to the BBC's New Generation Artists scheme, many of whose alumni go on

to become tomorrow's leading figures. Joining in September 2022 for two years are: accordionist Ryan Corbett from Scotland; countertenor Hugh Cutting from England; Colombian cellist Santiago Cañón-Valencia; the Berlin-based Leonkoro Quartet (recent winners of the Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition); New Zealand-born violinist Geneva Lewis; Scottish jazz pianist Fergus McCreadie; and, from South Africa, soprano Masabane Cecilia Rangwanasha. The truly global line-up will receive a host of broadcast and performance opportunities.

Aimard's Bartók in San Francisco

Pierre-Laurent Aimard is performing Bartók's First and Third Piano Concertos in San Francisco this month, with the San Francisco Symphony and conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen, and engineers will be on hand to capture these performances for subsequent release on Pentatone. Aimard and Salonen have collaborated many times in recent years and have developed an especially close musical rapport. This is definitely a recording to look out for – as well as a performance to attend in person if circumstances allow.



Wilhelm Furtwängler and the Berliner Philharmoniker

On 8 LPs



The radio recordings made between 1939 and 1945 with the Berliner Philharmoniker and Wilhelm Furtwängler are among classical music's most compelling sound documents. Created at the peak of the collaboration between orchestra and conductor, Furtwängler's artistic personality is conveyed more vividly than anywhere else. What can be heard is music in which inspiration and expression know no bounds and in which, not least, the existential experience of the Second World War reverberates.

The edition "The Radio Recordings 1939-1945" brings together all the surviving radio recordings from this period using the best available sources. For the first time, a selection of these outstanding concert recordings is now released in a vinyl box set of eight LPs. Using the enclosed code, you can also download all the recordings in studio quality.

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WHAT NEXT?

In our new bite-size feature, Richard Bratby takes as his starting point Rimsky-Korsakov's glorious *Sheherazade* – where will his listening journey lead?

A beautiful storyteller, a cruel sultan, a thousand nights of fairy tales ... Russian composers of the 19th century loved to fantasise about an imagined East, and in his 1888 'symphonic suite' Rimsky-Korsakov unleashes all his unrivalled flair for orchestral colour. *Sheherazade* rarely sounds anything less than spectacular, but **Sir Thomas Beecham** had a history with it that dated back to Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, and his classic 1957 recording with the **RPO** on **EMI** (10/58; now on Warner) still has an inimitable magic.

Rimsky-Korsakov's great friend **Borodin** liked to claim descent from Oriental royalty, and the Central Asian Polovtsians get some knockout tunes in the **Polovtsian Dances** from his opera *Prince Igor*, which remained unfinished at his death in 1887. (This flamboyant choral ballet later inspired the song from *Kismet* which became a chart hit, 'Stranger in

Paradise'.) Try the **Ukrainian National RSO** under **Theodore Kuchar** in 2003 on **Naxos**.

Then there's the child prodigy **Glazunov**, Rimsky-Korsakov's most devoted disciple. He composed his gloriously colourful one-act ballet **The Seasons** in 1899, and he never wrote anything quite so unbuttoned: the exuberant 'Bacchanale' contains one of those tunes that, once heard, is never forgotten. **Vladimir Ashkenazy's** version with the **RPO** on **Decca** (4/92) has real style.

Another Rimsky-Korsakov protégé, **Stravinsky** made a sensational debut in 1910 with the folk-inspired ballet **The Firebird**, which takes *Sheherazade's* fairy-tale atmosphere and ear-tingling orchestral effects to the next level. Shorter concert suites are available, but why deprive yourself of the sheer gorgeousness of **Sir Simon Rattle's** complete version with the **CBSO** on **EMI** (4/89)?

Rimsky-Korsakov's circle had a powerful effect on a generation of French composers,

and it's hard today to imagine

Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition (originally written in 1874 for solo piano) without the jewel-like tints of Ravel's 1922 orchestration – on dazzling display with **Giulini** and the **Chicago SO** on **DG** (4/77).

When Diaghilev's Ballets Russes worked with non-Russian artists, it chose the best. **Ravel** admitted that *Sheherazade* was one inspiration for his sumptuous 'choreographic symphony' **Daphnis et Chloé** (1912): a love story of ancient Greece, with a wordless chorus providing another layer of enchantment. Again, I recommend the complete version – try **François-Xavier Roth** with **Les Siècles** on **Harmonia Mundi** (6/17).

Durufié is best known for his haunting Requiem, but like many French composers of his generation he was intoxicated by Russian music. His ravishing **Trois danses** (1932) brings the spirit of *Sheherazade* into the jazz age. **John Wilson** and his **Sinfonia of London** on **Chandos** (2/20) are unrivalled.

Mezzo Teresa Berganza remembered

Teresa Berganza, the revered mezzo-soprano possessed of a tone combining purity of line with lustrous depth, has died at the age of 89. In an article for our Icons series (which you can read on our website), David Patrick Stearns honed in the two other aspects that defined her sound: 'her language and legato allowed her to expand what a mezzo could be, and in ways that were so fully realised that nearly everything about her makes sense to 21st-century ears'. As he pointed out, her voice wasn't huge, and she never sang anything heavier than Massenet's Charlotte (*Werther*). But roles such as Carmen, Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro* suited her perfectly.

Born in Madrid in 1933, her more-than-four-decade career began early enough for her to sing alongside the likes of Boris Christoff and Maria Callas, and yet continued into collaborations with stars still singing today. As well as an early start, her longevity also owes much to an impeccable technique, one she said was based on traditional *bel canto* methods drawn from 17th and 18th century arias.

Berganza's debut at the 1956 Aix-en-Provence Festival as Dorabella in *Così fan tutte* earned superlatives. Two years later

she sang Cherubino at Glyndebourne, followed in 1959 by the title role in *La Cenerentola*. Both Mozart and Rossini were to remain cornerstones – it was as Rosina that she made her debut at Covent Garden in 1960 (followed that season by Cherubino). 1960 also saw recordings begin in earnest, including Handel's *Alcina* alongside Joan Sutherland and conducted by Richard Bonyngue, for Decca, as well as an appearance on BBC television with Gerald Moore in songs including Falla's *Siete canciones populares españolas*. Of this recital, James Jolly later wrote: 'The magically floated *pianissimi* unveil, quite simply, a silvery quality which almost suggests the lure of the soprano register'.

Sesto in *La clemenza di Tito* was another acclaimed role, one she recorded twice (in 1967 with István Kertész for Decca, and 1979 with Karl Böhm for DG). In between these came milestone recordings of Rosina and the lead in *La Cenerentola* with Claudio Abbado (1971, for DG), and Dorabella with Sir Georg Solti (1974, Decca). On film, she sang Zerlina in Joseph Losey's 1979 *Don Giovanni*, with Ruggero Raimondi in the title-role and shot entirely in the Veneto. The later '70s also saw her finally accede to requests to sing Carmen, and following her debut in the role at the



Berganza as Carmen at San Francisco Opera, 1981

1977 Edinburgh Festival alongside Plácido Domingo, conducted by Abbado (and recorded for DG), it became something of a signature; hers was a compelling Carmen interpretation that prized beauty and pathos over earthy drama.

And if it's for these operatic roles that she'll remain best known, all admirers of both Berganza and the art of singing should also seek her out in Falla's folk song settings recorded for DG with guitarist Narciso Yepes, or the even more intimate recital they recorded of Spanish Renaissance and medieval music, where her vocal colour and Spanish soul unite in performances of a deeply personal resplendence.

Born March 16, 1933; died May 13, 2022

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...**Yo-Yo Ma*

We talk to the cellist about winning the prestigious Birgit Nilsson Prize

What does Nilsson herself mean to you?

It is such a great honour for this to be coming from the Foundation of someone who I have admired so much forever (although I never heard her sing live). Last night I listened to more of her voice, and, boy, there's nothing like it! But as I thought further about who she was, and continues to be, for so many people, I started to move beyond her legendary vocal talents, and to think about what she represented. She lived through some really tough periods in human society. And then for her to be told that, as a farmer's daughter, you don't sing opera ... But coming from five generations of farming *has* to leave a kind of intelligence about what land means. I started to think about the 'groundedness' of where she came from, and the lightness and humour with which she dealt with so many things. I want to think about how I can apply those values to the situation that we see in the world today, which is not so pleasant in so many aspects, with so many crises.

How might Birgit Nilsson's life and legacy shape your work in doing this?

Maybe I can apply some of what Birgit Nilsson did and say: 'How can we actually help by bringing people together?' That is what music does, it communes folk without ideology. So many people are in ideological compartments: you are this, therefore I won't talk to you. Well, maybe there's a place where you can actually bring people together, where they can talk to one another – a safe place where they're not going to feel immediately attacked, a place where they can be vulnerable to one another, so much so that they actually start listening to one another.

Like Nilsson, you support young artists. What particular challenges do they face?

Younger musicians don't have the ready-made paths that maybe people like me, a generation beforehand, had. There was a route to success: you win a competition, you get a record contract, you get a good



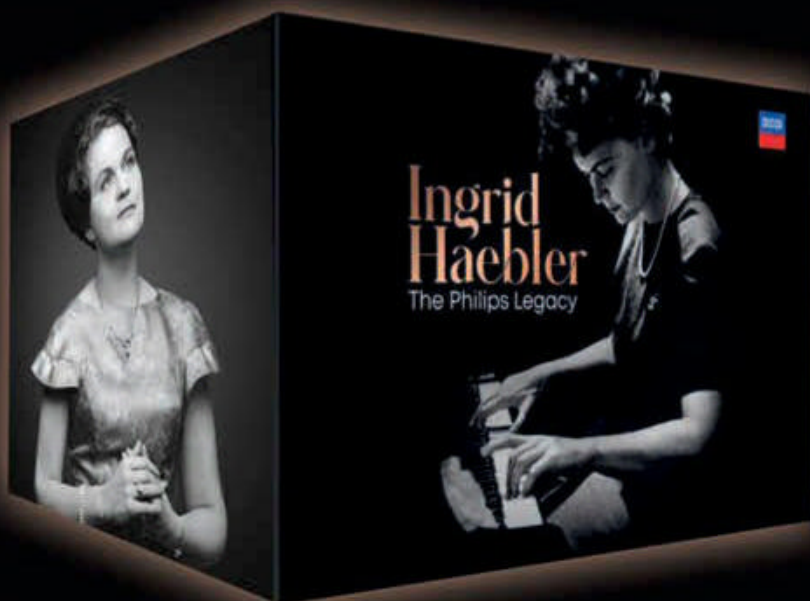
review ... but today it's much more dispersed. Young people do have the advantage of a lateral connection to their peer group across the world because they're part of a digital native generation. But how do they turn that to their advantage? And how do you ensure cross-generation communication, which is harder because when you have lateral communication, the vertical communication is going to be less strong?

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CARTE BLANCHE

In the first of a free-ranging new series, **James Jolly** meets one of the UK's great vocal Dames, the mezzo-soprano **Felicity Palmer**, to talk about her long and varied career



Witches, bitches and mothers-in-law

It's a beautiful May morning as I walk to Dame Felicity Palmer's London home. In normal times she wouldn't have been in; she'd have been in Zurich creating the role of Maria Thins in the world premiere run of Stefan Wirth's opera *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (based on the novel by Tracy Chevalier). 'It's a sad story really,' she tells me. 'I kept getting things wrong with me, but I had no symptoms of Covid, and I'd been triple vaccinated. Then suddenly I was pinged – "You've been near somebody with Omicron" – and I tested positive the next morning. I still had no symptoms and I was negative within three days, but of course I couldn't fly to Zurich for 10 days and they wouldn't have had me. In the end I cancelled the whole contract. It was quite a short, condensed, part and I think I could have done something with it. But what really, in the end, emerged – and I've come to this conclusion having talked to a lot of people – is that I just didn't want seven or eight weeks living abroad, even though I like Zurich and it's as good as it's going to get. I think all the back trouble and various things I'd been having were an indication of my body saying that we are really not going to do this anymore. The life wears pretty thin.'

Dame Felicity is enormously good company. She has some terrific stories and shoots from the hip. When I tell her, apologising that it might come across as rather un-galant, that she's been part of my musical life since I was in my teens, she sweeps my hesitation away because it's true: she has been singing professionally for over 50 years. 'When I meet old friends and we reminisce about the 1970s, you suddenly think of those hundreds of concerts you did in those days, which was a wonderful training ground. Philip Langridge and I used to say "If you went on any branch line before Beeching had a go at the railway network, you'd find us trundling off to some music club!" But we learned our trade.'

My first encounter with Palmer, then a soprano, was on an Argo LP of Fauré songs that she recorded with John Constable. I just looked up Felix Aprahamian's *Gramophone* review from August 1976 and was relieved to see that it chimes exactly



There's nothing like a Dame, Felicity Palmer

with my teenage recollection of the album: 'What a pleasure to hail Felicity Palmer's latest recording,' he wrote. 'It proves that her voice, which has ample volume and stamina for such things as Messiaen's *Poèmes pour Mi*, can also do justice to *La bonne chanson*.' Palmer takes up that story. 'We

'If you went on any branch line before Beeching, you'd find us trundling off to some music club!'

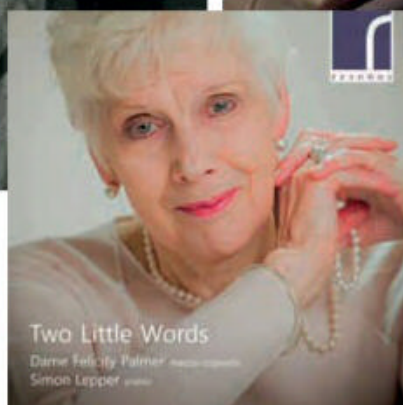
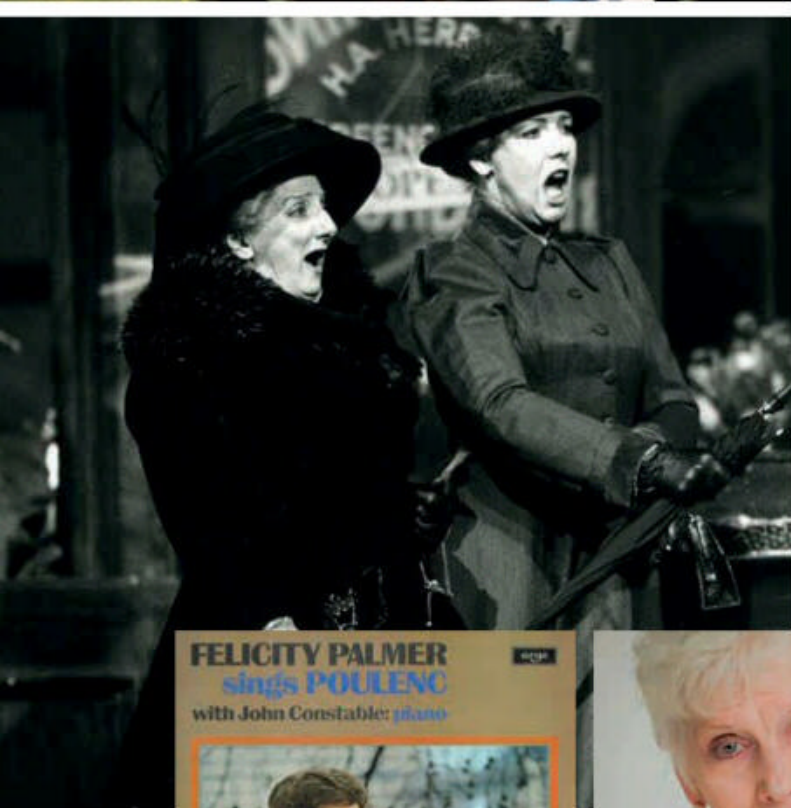
did a concert with Roger Norrington at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. I think it was 1973. Bits of Rameau and various random French things – it was kind of a miscellaneous concert, I suppose. At the end, this man, who was running Argo Records, came up and said, "We'd like to do three French records with you." Well, I mean, for a young singer ...! And that was how the Poulenc, Fauré and Ravel records came about. The Poulenc one actually meant a lot to me because Pierre Bernac, who I'd worked with briefly at college, wrote me the most wonderful letter to say that Poulenc would've been thrilled with it. And I thought "I've arrived!"'

Those Argo sessions were engineered by Stanley Goodall of whom Palmer has nothing but praise. 'He was so lovely. We were recording those programmes in St John's Smith Square. When we'd done all sorts of takes and things were getting slightly fraught with John saying, "Oh, God, I played an F sharp and I should have played F natural," Stan would just say, "Chocolate cake time." And everyone would be put at ease, but he of all people understood how to record. He knew where to put the mic to get the best out of me.'

The flip side, perhaps, might be said of the series of Masses recorded at St John's in Cambridge under George Guest. 'There was one session where we started recording and George would just do a sort of "instant music-making" and say, "Well, try an *mezzo forte* here and we'll do a *piano* there and so on." So we went to listen to a take and when we got back, I remember Philip Langridge (and it was not really like him in those days) saying, "Look, this is a load of rubbish. We'll do whatever dynamics we want to do." We were experienced enough, even in those days, just to take charge because on the circuit around England you would meet sometimes extremely good people, but on the whole some terrible choirs and terrible conductors. You learned that you just had to buckle down and get on with it. So we did! But I think George Guest did train the choir very well. It was an exciting sound, that choir.'

It's obvious from talking conductors with Palmer, that she admired the ones who had, as it were, taken the music apart, looked at how it worked and put it back together – Roger Norrington, John Eliot Gardiner, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Charles Mackerras. 'I had my issues with Charles – he nearly always had a scapegoat – but he was extremely clever at getting what he wanted. He accepted absolutely no nonsense. I'll never forget doing *Yeomen of the Guard* for Welsh National Opera. For the initial performances, it was the chorus master who conducted. And then Charles took over and we had a rehearsal in Oxford. I think I've never really seen a conductor take a piece and galvanise it. Within two

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Clockwise from top left: as the Countess in *The Queen of Spades* (ENO), as Kabanicha in *Kat'a Kabanová* (Glyndebourne), as Katisha with Eric Idle in *The Mikado* (ENO), as Madame de Croissy in *Dialogues des Carmélites* (The Met), and as in *Albert Herring* (Glyndebourne)

hours it became a completely other piece. He just knew how to do it.'

Another high point came in Moscow when Richard Hickox took his London Symphony Chorus over for two concerts, the first of which was Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* under Evgeny Svetlanov. 'Thanks to Richard, I was there. It was unforgettable. We got there, all of us thinking, "Well, I don't know how this is going to be, you know, a Russian orchestra and Svetlanov doing *Gerontius*." Svetlanov apparently had heard *Gerontius* years before and swore he would do it in Russia one day. The first rehearsal was just like a performance. They totally got it and it was absolutely wonderful. In the performance, there was no explanation for the audience of what it was or its religious content, but people came up with tears rolling down their faces ... It was the most astonishing

reaction. I think the KGB, well, they banned Svetlanov from going to the second concert in which Richard

was conducting *Belshazzar's Feast*. By then, the Russians – the KGB lot – had not at all liked the audience reaction to *Gerontius*.' We talk about the Countess in Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades*, of the numerous 'witches, bitches and mothers-in-law' which Palmer has so magnificently brought to life on stage, of her plans for a one-woman show that looks back over her career, of recording Messiaen with Boulez at 9.30 in the morning ('When you were young and strong, you didn't think about it'), her work with the director Nikolaus Lehnhoff and the superb *Kat'a Kabanová* they did together at Glyndebourne, of another Glyndebourne production, a near-perfect *Albert Herring* ('When we got to the garden fête scene, all the local ladies had made trifles and sandwiches. They were the real thing! This mountain of unbelievable food'), of memorising music ('I remember John Shirley-Quirk saying to me, "75 per

cent of the nerves for a recital are memory nerves') and the other string to her bow, as a diction coach (and few singers come even close to Palmer for her razor-sharp enunciation) ... and Sondheim. 'When I was singing Mrs Lovett in *Sweeney Todd* at Covent Garden, I have never worked so hard on anything, and neither had I ever before insisted on a pianist coming at half time to go through the things in the second half, just to make sure that they're running. I always had that feeling with Sondheim that if you lost the thread, it's not stuff you could sort of bungle and hope for the best ... It's either right or wrong.'

And talking of Sondheim, on her enchanting 2017 Resonus album, 'Two Little Words', with the pianist Simon Lepper very much a partner, Palmer sings 'Losing my mind' from *Follies*. It completes a programme that encapsulates in just an hour much of what makes Palmer such a special artist for so many people. As Tim Ashley said in his review 'It forms a personal, reflective summary of a life lived with, and through, music ... It's a lovely disc. Do listen to it.' **G**

NOTES & LETTERS

Write to us at St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB or gramophone@markallengroup.com; email is preferable at this time

Let's celebrate Alfvén's 150th!

It is appropriate, of course, to celebrate Ralph Vaughan Williams this year on the 150th anniversary of his birth. This, however, led me to think of another 150-year-old composer who was not mentioned in *Gramophone* on the same occasion (he was born on May 1, 1872). The name is Hugo Alfvén and, although he may not be quite in the same league as Vaughan Williams, he had, I believe, some similarities in terms of his inspiration, from pure academic lines in his symphonic writing to the more 'loose' form of Swedish folk influence in other works, including various choral pieces. A fair amount of his work has also been recorded.

Per Madsen

Copenhagen, Denmark

Unrecorded Vaughan Williams

As there are now festivals to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Ralph Vaughan Williams, I sincerely hope there will be an interest in the more substantial works that have never received a modern recording and those which have been completely overlooked. The short cantata *Flourish for a Coronation* to mark the Coronation of King George VI is one such work conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham on April 1, 1937 which has fortunately been preserved and reissued. Another such work is the *Masque of Charterhouse* which to my knowledge has never received a commercial recording. The words and music were originally written and performed in 1911 with revised versions following in 1922, 1929, 1935, and 1947, and incorporated orchestral arrangements of two songs, these being *Carmen Carthusianum* originally by William Horsley and *Auctor Omnium Bonorum* by Haig Brown. In 1956 Vaughan Williams was noted as saying: 'I believe our *Carmen* is the finest school song in existence.'

Thomas E Rookes

Lincoln, Lincs

Pierre Monteux's LSO quip

Michael D Gottfried's heartwarming report on his recent attendance at a Herbert Blomstedt concert with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and his comments that the 95-year-old conductor has engagements booked through 2024 (Notes and Letters, May,

Letter of the Month

Dame Janet Baker: superlative in Mahler

When I saw Edward Seckerson's piece on Janet Baker (March, page 13) I had to write. I first saw her in her first recital at Carnegie Hall and would go on to see her a number of times in recital and with orchestra in New York, Los Angeles and Boston. It was in Boston (January 1969) that I had the great privilege to turn pages for her pianist, the wonderful Martin Issep. When I asked her to autograph my programme she couldn't quite understand why I would want it. So she wrote, 'To Tom, you deserve this for what it's worth.' I have it framed.

Also, when I was playing the premiere performances of Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* I asked Lenny if he was familiar with Dame Janet. He certainly was but up to that point he had never worked with her. I told him that as a great Mahler conductor he should work with her as she was, in my opinion, the great Mahler singer of our, if not all, time. (I admit Christa Ludwig comes very close. I also turned pages for Lenny and Christa when they did a wonderful all-Brahms Lieder recital at Carnegie Hall in 1971). It was about two years later that I heard their collaboration with the Mahler Second. To this day I hope I had a little something to do with putting them together.

Edward Seckerson mentioned that among the questions he wanted to ask her was: Does she listen to herself objectively or recognise her uniqueness? It reminded me of an interview on the



Janet Baker: can she listen to her voice objectively?

CBC where the interviewer asked her if she recognised her voice when listening to her recordings? She told the story that one day she had the radio on and they were playing the *Wesendonck-Lieder*. She said she didn't recognise the voice but thought it was a beautiful performance. It was her, but, as she said, that is not how she hears her voice.

I would just like to add that the same thing also happened to me. I was driving home one day and had the radio on and I heard a performance of Stravinsky's *Dumbarton Oaks*. The performance was good and I liked the flute playing – I thought it sounded French. So I waited to find out who it was. It was me. Like Janet said, 'I don't hear myself that way.'

Tommy Kay

Kitchener, Ontario, Canada

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page 132), reminds me of the story of the great French maestro Pierre Monteux who, when he was offered the post of Principal Conductor at the London Symphony Orchestra at the age of 86,

accepted only on the condition that the contract was for 25 years, and with an option to renew.

Barry Borman

Edgware, Middx

Editorial note

Rob Cowan writes: I must apologise to our readers and to the members of the Castalian Quartet when, in the context of enthusiastically reviewing the Delphian album 'Between Two Worlds' (June, page 58), I suggested that the Quartet

might have profitably played the long first-movement repeat of Beethoven's Op 132 Quartet.

As reader Timothy Dowling has rightly pointed out, I was thinking of Op 130, where the long repeat is rarely played. Op 132 doesn't have one.

OBITUARIES

WILLIAM BENNETT

Flautist

Born February 7, 1936

Died May 11, 2022



The inspirational British flautist William Bennett has died at the age of 86. 'Wibb' – as he was affectionately known, thanks to the initials of his full name

William Ingham Brooke Bennett – was devoted to playing and teaching. He was determined for the flute to be regarded as a multi-dimensional, versatile instrument, a singing tone (he was inspired by Janet Baker) always being the ultimate goal.

Wibb was born in London but spent his childhood in Buckinghamshire, where his architect parents relocated during the war. Being thrown into a world of artistic gatherings and exhibitions early on, Wibb excelled at painting (he continued to sketch throughout his life), though he also enjoyed encounters with music thanks to the family's wind-up gramophone and their friendship with their neighbour, Edmund Rubbra. When Wibb was sent to boarding school at the age of seven, music became a refuge: first the recorder, then the piano, then the guitar. Finally, at the age of 12, having long been entranced by the sound of the flute (he would listen to recordings of Jean-Pierre Rampal and the French master Marcel Moyse at the Rubbras' house), he persuaded his parents to buy him his first proper instrument.

A period of study at the Guildhall School of Music from the age of 15 with Geoffrey Gilbert led to a scholarship to work with Rampal in Paris; later, in the 1960s, he studied with Moyse. Even early in his career, he was determined to find the an instrument capable of the perfect sound; this led to him building his own flute using a gas poker and a pair of scissors. His experiments with altering the tone holes to improve intonation resulted in the William Bennett Scale, still adopted by several of today's flute makers.

He began his orchestral career in 1958 with the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra. He was subsequently invited to play with the RPO, ECO, LSO (where he was Principal Flute from 1967-72) and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, among others. He also started a regular duo with the pianist Clifford Benson, and worked regularly with George Malcolm, who was the harpsichordist on a recording of Bach's flute sonatas and who conducted Bennett and the ECO for the two Mozart flute concertos (Decca). Bennett made the first British recordings of the complete Handel flute sonatas and the premiere recording of Richard Rodney Bennett's *Winter Music*, which was written for him. Among his other recordings are the Mozart flute quartets with the Grumiaux Trio (Philips), music for flute by Villa-Lobos (Hyperion), *Sinfonie di Concerto Grosso* by Alessandro Scarlatti with I Musici (Philips) and many chamber programmes for various labels

During the 1980s, Bennett was a professor of flute in Freiburg, Germany, and he later taught at the Royal Academy of Music. His International Flute Summer School ran for more than 35 years and was, for many flautists, a permanent fixture on their calendars. A larger-than-life character, he was known for his hilarious one-liners as quoted in Edward Blakeman's biography *Wibb: A Flute for Life* (1/17): playing the Bach Triple with Menuhin was 'a centipede with a pair of balls between each set of legs'; and making Berio sound romantic was 'like putting lipstick on a dead potato'. When the news broke of his death, the oboist Nicholas Daniel, who first played with Bennett in the ECO, paid fitting tribute: 'Just playing with him was a lesson in projection, articulation and tuning,' he wrote online.

ANNE HOWELLS

Mezzo-soprano

Born January 12, 1941

Died May 18, 2022

The British mezzo, known for her breadth of repertoire, has died at the age of 81.

NEXT MONTH AUGUST 2022



Authentic Mahler

We speak to the conductor François-Xavier Roth about his new period-instrument recording of Mahler 4 with Les Siècles and soprano Sabine Devieille

Lapwood's life

We talk to the dynamic choral conductor Anna Lapwood about musical life at Pembroke College, Cambridge, and discuss her forthcoming recordings

Puccini's Tosca

Mark Pullinger sorts the heroes from the villains among the many available recordings of an opera that was dismissed by critics at its 1900 premiere, yet which has firmly found its way into the affections of the public

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Born in Southport, then in Lancashire, Howells studied at the Royal Manchester College of Music before making her professional debut with Welsh National

Opera as Flora in *La traviata*, a role that would also provide her with her Covent Garden debut in 1967. She sang with the Royal Opera company from the 1960s to the '90s, appearing there for the last time in 1998 as Háta in *The Bartered Bride*.

She sang a great deal of contemporary music, creating roles in operas by Nicholas Maw, Richard Rodney Bennett and Mark-Anthony Turnage. She also sang Lady de Hautdesert on the world-premiere recording of Sir Harrison Birtwistle's *Gawain* (NMC).

In 1985 she sang Octavian opposite Kiri Te Kanawa in a production of *Der Rosenkavalier* conducted by Sir Georg Solti, a much-admired performance captured on video (Opus Arte). She also appears on the Opus Arte film of Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* with Dame Joan Sutherland and Alfredo Kraus in John Copley's production. On record she can be heard as Ascagne on Sir Colin Davis's Philips recording of Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, as Annina on Solti's *Der Rosenkavalier* (Decca), as Erisebe in Cavalli's *L'Ormindo* conducted by Raymond Leppard (Philips), as Mrs McLean in Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* conducted by Kent Nagano for Virgin Classics and as Mother Goose on Sir John Eliot Gardiner's DG recording of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*.

SIMON PRESTON

Organist, choirmaster and composer
Born August 4, 1938
Died May 13, 2022



Known equally as a superb organist and an inspirational choirmaster, Simon Preston has died at the age 83. Born in Bournemouth, Preston attended Canford School in Wimborne and was a chorister at King's College, Cambridge; after studying the organ at the Royal Academy of Music with CH Trevor, he returned to King's as organ scholar.

From 1962 to '67 he was sub-organist at Westminster Abbey and then from 1970, organist of Christ Church, Oxford. In 1981, he returned to Westminster Abbey as Organist and Master of the

Choristers, a post he relinquished in 1987 to pursue a freelance career as a concert organist.

Preston recorded extensively. He first appeared in *Gramophone* in April 1959, playing the organ of King's College Chapel for an Argo LP of music by Orlando Gibbons (a 16th-century King's alumnus) directed by David Willcocks, and the following year on a Willcocks-directed Bach *St John Passion*. In March 1963, he appeared on two solo releases on Argo, heralding a magnificent series of 10 solo recordings made during the 1960s that embraced a huge repertoire from ancient to modern, including some now classic recordings of music by Olivier Messiaen. (He also played the organ part for the world-premiere Decca recording of Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*.)

At Oxford's Christ Church Cathedral, he worked hard on the sound of the choir, making it superbly responsive for music of the 20th century, as an album of Stravinsky and Poulenc superbly demonstrates. In the 1980s, and often alongside Trevor Pinnock and The English Concert, Preston made a number of recordings of earlier English music – Purcell and Handel, in particular (including a second traversal of Handel's organ concertos, this time for Archiv, marking a move to DG). He recorded the complete Bach organ works for DG and also appeared with the Berlin Philharmonic and James Levine for the Saint-Saëns *Organ Symphony*, and with the Boston Symphony and Seiji Ozawa for Poulenc's Concerto for Organ, Strings and Timpani. Preston was also a composer, and his organ music demonstrated his love of the work of Messiaen – *Alleluyas*, perhaps his best-known composition, being a particularly good example.

MARC ROCHESTER

Organist and Gramophone contributor
Born April 28, 1954
Died May 5, 2022



Marc Rochester, who joined the reviewing panel in 1989, focusing mainly on organ music, has died at the age of 68.

Born in London, Rochester started his musical life as a chorister. He took his first organ lessons from his father and subsequent teachers included Peter Mound (at Aldershot Parish Church), Michael Austin (Wimborne Minster) and Martin Neary (Westminster Abbey). He

studied music at the University of Wales in Cardiff where he was organ scholar and worked alongside Robert Joyce at Llandaff Cathedral. As a solo recitalist he performed throughout Europe, Asia, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

At the age of 24, Rochester became one of the youngest people ever to hold the position of Organist and Master of the Choristers at a British cathedral when he was appointed to Londonderry Cathedral in Northern Ireland. At the time of his death he was Resident Organist of Dewan Filharmonik Petronas in Kuala Lumpur, a role he held since its inception in 1998. For 13 years he was also Resident Organist to the Malaysian Philharmonic.

He was appointed an Examiner for the ABRSM in 1982, and in 2001 moved across to Trinity where he was Assistant Chief Examiner and South East Asia Regional Consultant. He stepped down in 2014 after touring to almost 50 countries and examining an estimated 150,000 candidates in every imaginable instrument and musical discipline.

ALEXANDER TORADZE

Pianist
Born May 30, 1952
Died May 11, 2022



The Georgian-born American pianist, known for his iron-clad technique, has died at the age of 69. He started his studies at six in Tbilisi

before moving to the Moscow Conservatory where he worked with, among others, Yakov Zak and Lev Naumov. In 1977, a silver medal win at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition put him on the map and so began a major career. In 1983, while on tour in the US with the Bolshoi SO, he sought asylum and settled in Indiana where he taught at Indiana University South Bend. His concert-giving found him working with many of the world's greatest orchestras.

He recorded for EMI and Philips, for the latter an impressive set of the five Prokofiev piano concertos with Valery Gergiev and the Kirov Orchestra; of the Second Concerto, Bryce Morrison wrote (4/98): 'His very free way with the opening is truly *narrante* and he impresses with a sinister sense of darkness and power in the massively accumulating cadenza and development. On the other hand, he takes a lighter hand to the finale than is usual, replacing a more familiar brutal slog with playing of a dazzling reflex and vivacity.'

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Help us find the 2022 Orchestra of the Year, a worthy successor to last year's Minnesota Orchestra, led by the ever-impressive Osmo Vänskä

Bayerisches Staatsorchester (Germany)



The orchestra of Munich's Bavarian State Opera has made a great impression on record this year: in the pit (and on DVD) for Hans Abrahamsen's *The Snow Queen* and Korngold's *Die tote Stadt* (of which Richard Bratby wrote that Kirill Petrenko's 'Bavarian orchestra can deliver lushness without limits'). But perhaps the most impressive example of the orchestra's work – in full symphony orchestra guise, and for the first release on its own label – was Mahler's Seventh Symphony which was our Recording of the Month last August and had Edward Seckerson declaring: 'Petrenko demands to be heard and attention paid'.

Mahler Symphony No 7 Bayerisches Staatsorchester / Kirill Petrenko (BRORec, A/21)

Budapest Festival Orchestra (Hungary)



The Budapest Festival Orchestra, founded almost 40 years ago by Iván Fischer and Zoltán Kocsis, is one of Central Europe's glories, an ensemble the equal of any, and thanks to its relationship with Channel Classics displayed regularly on record, in magnificent sound. Fischer has fine-tuned

the sound of this great orchestra and can draw playing of real class – every performance is a 'festival'. As Peter Quantrill wrote of their Brahms Third: 'the orchestra bends and yields to the music's expressive pulse with an unanimity of purpose that entirely belies the sophistication of Fischer's *rubato*.' And the Mahler symphony series currently underway has delivered numerous treasures.

Brahms Symphony No 3. Serenade No 2 Budapest Festival Orch / Iván Fischer (Channel Classics, 8/21)

Czech Philharmonic (Czech Republic)



Another great European ensemble, with a heritage that stretches back to 1896 when Antonín Dvořák, no less, conducted the first concert. With some legendary names among its chief conductors, the Czech Philharmonic is now in the excellent care of Semyon Bychkov, a fine conductor and someone who understands the orchestra's traditional colours and style. Their partnership has given us distinctive Tchaikovsky and just a couple of months ago an impressive Mahler Fourth (inaugurating a symphony cycle for Pentatone) enshrining playing that David Gutman described quite simply as 'wonderful'.

Mahler Symphony No 4 Reiss; Czech PO / Semyon Bychkov (Pentatone, 5/22)

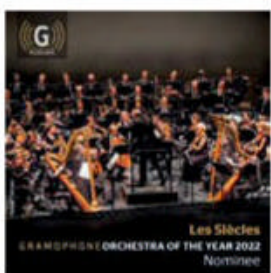
The Hallé (UK)



For years this storied Manchester-based ensemble was linked to the name of Sir John Barbirolli (its Principal Conductor from 1943 to '70), but after 22 glorious years, The Hallé-Sir Mark Elder partnership has also become the stuff of legend. Thanks to the establishment of its own label, The Hallé's recent performances, and consistently high standards, have been available for all to hear. A Vaughan Williams symphony cycle, recently completed, has renewed the orchestra's traditional relationship with the composer and delivered some truly glorious music-making, with a Ninth, as Andrew Achenbach comments, 'that should ... be sought out by all admirers of the composer'.

Vaughan Williams *Sinfonia antartica. Symphony No 9* The Hallé / Sir Mark Elder (Hallé, 7/22)

Les Siècles (France)



François-Xavier Roth's superb French period-band this year took on, and magnificently delivered, one of opera's greatest challenges, Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Mark Pullinger enjoyed 'the orchestral contributions of Les Siècles and the lucidity that period instruments bring to Debussy's score'. The colours Roth finds come as no surprise given the superb series of recordings of French music they have already made together (securing *Gramophone* Awards and Editor's Choices). This month's album of the Ravel piano concertos had Harriet Smith writing of the Left-hand Concerto that 'the opening, which is so often reduced to a murky rumbling, here has the clarity of a finely restored Rembrandt', a review that propelled it to be named our Recording of the Month for July.

Ravel *Piano Concertos, etc* Tiberghien; Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth (Harmonia Mundi, 7/22)

Mahler Chamber Orchestra (Europe)



Emerging from the Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra in 1997, and nurtured in its early days by Claudio Abbado, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra gathers together about 45 players from 20 different countries. It has established itself as one of Europe's leading chamber orchestras and regularly works with the musical greats of today. Their two 'Mozart Momentum' collections, with Leif Ove Andsnes directing from the piano, as well as working on chamber music together, have been triumphs, drawing praise from Harriet Smith who declared them 'some of the finest Mozart-playing on the planet'.

'Mozart Momentum 1786' Mahler Chamber Orchestra / Leif Ove Andsnes (Sony Classical, 5/22)

Oslo Philharmonic (Norway)



To launch a conductor-orchestra partnership with the complete Sibelius symphonies makes quite a statement, but with one of the most sought-after conductors around on the podium, Klaus Mäkelä's recorded debut clearly justified the decision. Deeply impressed by the cycle, Edward Seckerson concluded that 'Mäkelä's cycle is all of a piece, accomplished, insightful and full of the beauty and intrigue that make these works so perennially exciting. An uber-auspicious debut.' While

Mäkelä's himself declared his Norwegian orchestra 'a really wonderful group of people, but very serious and really engaged'.

Sibelius *Symphonies* Oslo Philharmonic / Klaus Mäkelä (Decca, 4/22)

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (USA)



Manfred Honeck's tenure, since 2008, at the helm of this superb Pennsylvanian orchestra has really delivered. Sophisticated, classy, stylish playing underscores everything it does. Analysing the PSO's sound in a review of their recent Brahms Fourth, David Gutman wrote that 'though capable of cushioned "European" warmth, the Pittsburgh Symphony has a cleaner, brighter edge than traditionally associated with big-band Brahms. The winds make a tellingly linear contribution, not content with merely poking through saturated string tone at key points.' Next up, Beethoven's *Pastoral* coupled, as has become a tradition with all their recordings, with something imaginatively unexpected: Steven Stucky's *Silent Spring*.

Brahms *Symphony No 4* MacMillan Larghetto for Orchestra Pittsburgh SO / Manfred Honeck (Reference Recordings, A/20)

Sinfonia of London (UK)



Created, rather like the Philharmonia, as a recording orchestra, John Wilson's Sinfonia of London revives the name (and concept) of the 1950s and '60s 'supergroup' that recorded with Barbirolli and Colin Davis, not to mention setting down numerous film scores. Cast with the crème de la crème of London's orchestral players, the Sinfonia has become a byword for outstanding corporate musicianship and palpable style. Whether in Korngold, Dutilleux, Respighi, Ravel or John Ireland, the Sinfonia magnificently captures a sound world that transfers gloriously to recordings, especially when so faithfully engineered by Chandos. Writing of *Ma mère l'oye*, Edward Seckerson commented that 'Wilson and his players really capture the piquancy of these exquisite tableaux, their limpidness and fragrance, be it the *Prélude* with its elfin horn fanfares, the *Pavane for Sleeping Beauty* or the delicate willow patterning of the *Empress of the Pagodas*'.

Ravel *Orchestral works* Sinfonia of London / John Wilson (Chandos, 3/22)

Vienna Philharmonic (Austria)



One of the undisputed great orchestras of the world, steeped in tradition, the Vienna Philharmonic is unique in not having a chief conductor, though in its guise as the orchestra of the Vienna State Opera, Philippe Jordan takes charge. Its corporate identity of peerless strings, elegant winds and punchy brass contribute to its role as 'keeper of the flame' in so much of the core Austro-German repertoire. Of Bruckner's Fourth Symphony (part of an ongoing cycle for Sony Classical), Richard Osborne wrote that 'this mood of inner quiet that underpins both the symphony and this remarkable realisation of it is most evident in the slow movement ... which draws from [Christian] Thielemann and the Vienna Philharmonic music making of the rarest pedigree.' And it's a pedigree witnessed the world over every New Year's Day when the Vienna Philharmonic plays music as only it knows how.

Bruckner *Symphony No 4* Vienna PO / Christian Thielemann (Sony Classical, 11/21)

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Close Encounters IN THE CONCERT HALL

Andrew Farach-Colton explores the concertos of John Williams, talking to conductor Leonard Slatkin, as well as to cellist Yo-Yo Ma and violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter about works newly written and newly revised

“**L**et me tell you a story,’ Leonard Slatkin says. ‘As the year 2000 was approaching, I received a request to do an interview with *Time* magazine. They were looking for people to talk about the most important figures in their fields in the 20th century. I said, “Sure,” and one question they asked was who I thought was the most

influential composer of the last hundred years. Without missing a beat, I answered, “John Williams.” “No, no, no,” they said. “We don’t mean that. We’re talking about Stravinsky or Schoenberg.” So I said, “Look, can you name seven people on the planet who haven’t heard *something* by John Williams?”’

Slatkin’s anecdote made me laugh in part because it comes so very close to the truth. And yet I know why *Time*’s journalists were protesting. It wasn’t to deny Williams’s blockbuster success, but rather to separate his work as a film composer from the sacrosanct canon of classical music. It’s a story almost as old as cinema itself, as any fan of Korngold or Herrmann can tell you. Some will argue that Korngold and Herrmann were classical composers *first*, and worked in Hollywood only to support their families; and they might be surprised to discover that Williams’s story isn’t so different after all.

His initial background was in jazz, it’s true. His father was a drummer who worked with the inventively zany bandleader Raymond Scott, and by all accounts John Jr’s talent as a jazz pianist put him in the prodigy category. Yet classical music was an early interest, too, and he studied composition with Castelnuovo-Tedesco while at university in Los Angeles. Then, after service in the US Air Force, he went to Juilliard. ‘Even when he first started writing for TV in the late ’50s and early ’60s,’ Slatkin says, ‘John was simultaneously writing what we would traditionally call classical music.’ Slatkin’s parents – brilliant classically trained musicians who founded the Hollywood String Quartet – made their living playing in studio orchestras, so the entire Slatkin family knew Johnny Williams (as he called himself then) from the very outset of his career.



Longtime friends and colleagues: Williams and Slatkin in 2014

One can hear Williams’s jazz expertise and his penchant for stylistic intermixing in a Prelude and Fugue he wrote in 1965 for Stan Kenton’s Los Angeles Neophonic Orchestra. In the Fugue, the brass and woodwind slither and strut in a manner that’s redolent of noir detective television programmes. What I find most striking, however, are the Prelude’s darkly coloured sonorities, and the chaotic explosion about a minute and a half in, which in a single dramatic stroke allies the work with other experimental new music of its time.

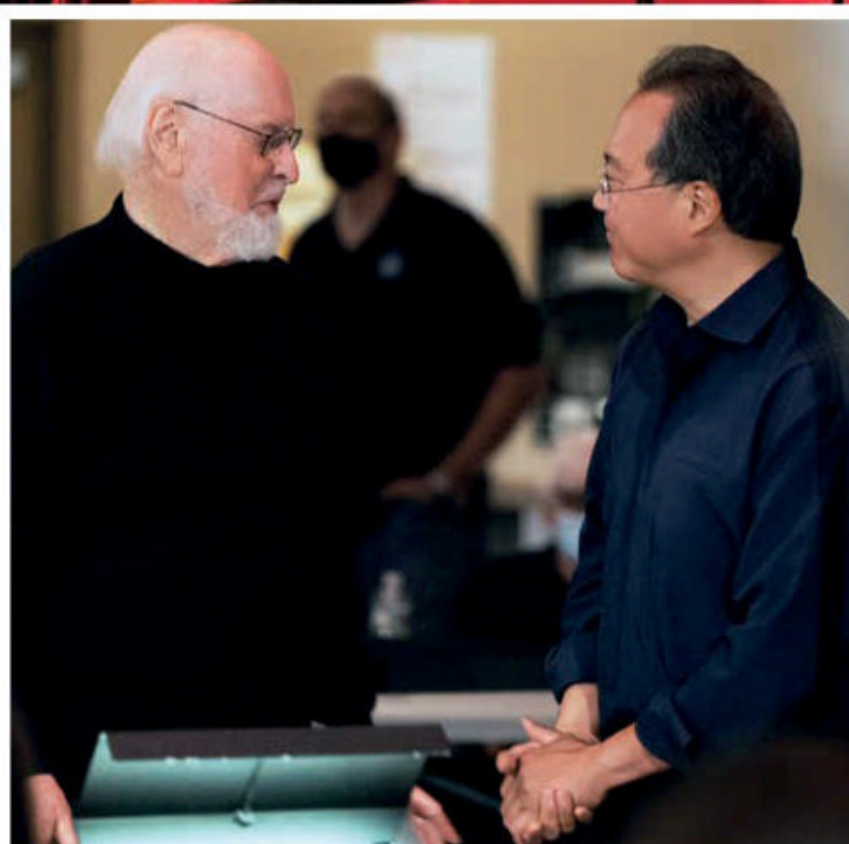
That same year, 1965, Williams also produced a brooding, monochromatic *Essay* for string orchestra. A bracingly acerbic *Simfonietta* for wind ensemble followed in 1968 (recorded by DG around 1970, along with works by Mayuzumi and Penderecki; the disc – reviewed in *Gramophone* in September 1972 – demands to be reissued), as well as a Flute Concerto in 1969 in which the solo part sometimes evokes the piercing sound of the Japanese shakuhachi. Like most of his colleagues at the time, Williams employed 12-note techniques in his concert music, although never very strictly. ‘In all these pieces you can hear that he was very much influenced by Penderecki,’ Slatkin says, ‘and maybe to some degree by Lutosławski, too. The sense of him as an American composer never really pops up in these pieces. He’s simply writing abstract music



along more or less the same lines as his contemporary European counterparts.'

Slatkin believes that it was writing for films that changed Williams's outlook when it came to concert music. 'Now as he's scoring films he has to deal with imagery and creating specific moods, and I think that wound up influencing the concert music. I'd say that his First Violin Concerto was the turning point.' Completed in 1976, the concerto wasn't written with any particular soloist in mind but rather as a homage to his first wife, Barbara, who had died a couple of years earlier. Slatkin conducted the premiere in 1981 with violinist Mark Peskanov, and they recorded it with the LSO soon thereafter (along with the Flute Concerto, featuring the orchestra's principal Peter Lloyd). The First Violin Concerto has been taken up by other violinists since, including Gil Shaham, who recorded a revised version of the work for DG in 1999 under the composer's direction.

If one encounters Williams's concert music having only heard his film music, the experience can be a jolt. The surprise is not so much that he's continued to employ 12-note techniques (for even as early as the First Violin Concerto, he sews tonality and atonality together quite seamlessly); what I imagine will be most disconcerting is the relative lack of memorable tunes and motifs of the sort that are so plentiful in his film scores.



Williams and Ma: Tonight Show, 2006 (top); recording together in 2021

Indeed, in his concert music there are precious few tunes at all. There's abundant lyricism, certainly, but the melodic writing is extraordinarily long-breathed and seems to evolve organically, often spreading out in curling tendrils.

Compared with his concert music, says Slatkin, 'In his film music there's not so much counterpoint – simply because if you put in too much at once, you're going to distract from what's on the screen; the music is dictated by the visuals. But in his

concert music, of course, he *can* do that.' And, yet, despite these sometimes stark differences, the concert music still bears Williams's unmistakable fingerprints. 'There are sounds that run through most of his music, usually involving chimes and bells, and the way the brass are voiced – so you might recognise that it's John's music not necessarily through the musical language but through the *sonic* language. The interesting thing to me is that as he's moved through what must now be 18 concertos or so, he seems to have been having more fun with it. Some of the concertos, like the First Violin Concerto and the Cello Concerto, are very serious pieces, but the others have more humorous moments where he gives you a little bit of a smile.'

That smile is quite evident in Williams's next concerto after the first for violin: the Tuba Concerto, which followed nine

eventful years later, in 1985. In the interim, he'd produced some of his most iconic film scores, including the first three *Star Wars* releases, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Superman*, two *Indiana Jones* adventures and *ET The Extra-Terrestrial*. In 1980, he'd also assumed the directorship of the Boston Pops Orchestra following Arthur Fiedler's death, and the Tuba Concerto was composed for the orchestra's principal, Chester Schmitz, to mark the orchestra's 100th anniversary.

Of all the concertos, this is perhaps the one that sounds closest to his film music. The opening, with eagerly pulsing violins accompanying the tuba's jovial, syncopated dance (all in an unambiguous C major), suggests a rollicking adventure ahead. And if Williams adhered to an international style of modernism in his concert works from the 1960s and '70s, here he sounds unabashedly American: note the Coplandesque rhythms and bright colours in the orchestral *tutti* two minutes into the first movement. As in the case of the previous concertos, however, as well as in those to come, the Tuba Concerto is not very easily pigeonholed. One is never sure what might emerge from the shadows in the nocturnal central *Andante*, for instance, and although the finale's fanfares create a festive air initially, that sense of something possibly malevolent lurking in the dark corners remains to the end.

'There's no genre of music John doesn't know and that he hasn't studied. And that's all available to him as the many hundreds of arrows in his quiver' – *Yo-Yo Ma*

Since his Tuba Concerto, all of Williams's subsequent concertos and concert works have been composed for particular players – both star soloists and orchestral musicians – and he's produced them in a fairly steady stream. Each concerto is a character study of sorts, inspired by both the player and the instrument itself. Nature is another inspiration, and trees in particular. The Bassoon Concerto, titled *The Five Sacred Trees* (1995), draws upon poetry by Robert Graves; *Treesong* (2000) for violin and orchestra is a tone-painting in concerto form; similarly, *Heartwood* (2001) for cello and orchestra is described as 'lyric sketches'; and the Harp Concerto, *On Willows and Birches* (2009), draws on Psalm 137 and the nature poetry of Robert Frost.

Slatkin believes the Bassoon Concerto to be among Williams's most imaginative works. 'I think it's an extraordinary piece,' he says, then adds (adopting contemporary youthful parlance): 'It's got all the moods. Honestly, for me it's the finest work for that instrument and orchestra that I can think of. I did it recently in Lyon with the principal bassoonist there, and that these concertos are being played by orchestral musicians all over the world speaks volumes. Obviously, we can't predict what the ultimate future holds, but his showcasing of instruments that don't have a lot of repertoire and the consistent quality of his writing just might ensure John a strong place in the concert world for a long time.'

The Oboe Concerto (2011) doesn't display any overt reference to trees or nature, but with its bucolic tone it's not so far removed from the English pastoral school. (In my listening notes to the first movement, I wrote: 'If Alan Hovhaness had lived in the Cotswolds.') The composer has spoken in interviews about his love for 20th-century English music, and Slatkin – whose own affection for English music runs quite deep – says he hears this connection often in Williams's music, both in the concert works and in the film scores. He believes Walton to have been if not

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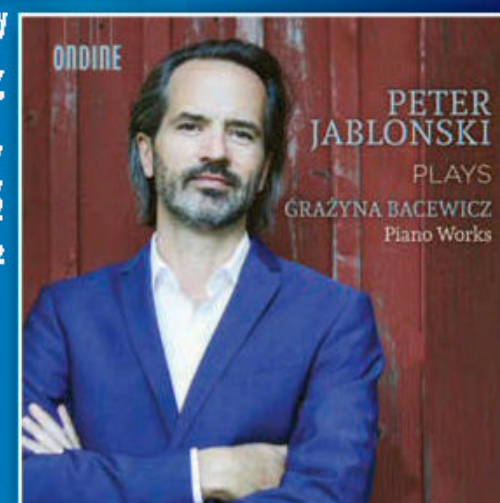
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Williams and Mutter working on their 2019 album of film themes, 'Across the Stars', on DG

a direct influence then at least an inspiration, adding that Williams's overall knowledge of film music is profound: 'From Walton's epic scores to Vaughan Williams's *Scott of the Antarctic*, and, of course, all the Hollywood composers including Korngold and Max Steiner – he knows them all.'

'There's no genre of music John doesn't know and that he hasn't studied,' says Yo-Yo Ma, for whom Williams wrote his Cello Concerto in 1994. 'And that's all available to him as the many hundreds of arrows in his quiver. He's always curious, and as a composer, I think, he's always trying to *understand*.' Ma first met Williams when he was a soloist with the Boston Pops Orchestra some four decades ago. 'We've had so many conversations where he's just finished a book and can't stop thinking about it, and he'll tell me how much he'd love to have the opportunity to meet the author and ask questions. So I feel I've gotten to know a bit about the pattern of his thinking over the years. He's a gentle, thoughtful person yet he has *very* deep convictions, and he's always observing and interpreting what's around him – and he translates all that into sound.'

The Cello Concerto is a substantial, complex and remarkably serious work. Even the two middle movements, 'Blues' and Scherzo, seem to harbour an element of danger. In the opening 'Theme and Cadenza', the cello part is nearly always striving

'He's so deeply, passionately involved with everything he writes, constantly crafting it to an even higher degree so that one day he might be satisfied' – Anne-Sophie Mutter

May (both on Sony). Williams has said that he cast the cello in 'a kind of hero's role', but the hero the music conjures for me is no Hollywood figure but rather Don Quixote. When I sheepishly mention this to Ma, he says, 'That's so interesting,

for something, its melodic line curving ever upwards. The finale, 'Song', begins in an elegiac mood and hints at redemption or love (or both); the way it ends depends on whether you listen to the original version (recorded in 2001) or the more recent revision (2021), which was released in

because I think of the work as being somewhat autobiographical, and as we know, heroes never emerge unscathed. There's always a cost to heroism, right?'

We speak about Don Quixote being among the most human of literary heroes.

'We have ideals and goals, and sometimes these are flawed,' Ma says. 'What's beautiful about this new version of the Cello Concerto, I think, is that a human figure emerges who's certainly not unscathed, but is intact. John has created this arc from the first note to the last, and as with all great works, you as the player or the listener experience that journey. Each movement gives us another view of this character, and I'm clearly narrating from the character's point of view. At the end – that last movement – there's a kind of apotheosis, an integration, that's truly and deeply moving.'

The new recording of the Cello Concerto was made with Williams conducting the New York Philharmonic, and Ma says it was one of the first projects the orchestra had undertaken since the start of the pandemic. 'The players are great musicians and they don't suffer fools gladly, but something happened during that session. He was conducting and saying very little, and I can't tell you how moved they were to be playing his music and playing it for him. I've never felt the New York Philharmonic more humanly vulnerable and pliable.

So many players went up to him afterwards and said it was one of the most beautiful experiences they'd ever had. It's an experience I'll certainly never forget – to be watching and playing for this great master at work. We all knew it and felt it. It wasn't Williams the film composer or the classical composer – it was Williams the man.'

Ma, like so many other musicians who've worked with Williams, says he's in awe of the composer's craftsmanship. 'You should look at one of his manuscripts – the writing is so beautiful, and I think that attests to his artistry. It's so clear what he's thinking – it's more Bach than Beethoven, if you know what I mean. He edits, of course, but what comes directly out of his mind is already so lucid, and that's a measure of his unbelievable clarity of thinking, and of all his work over the years. It's really part of his nature. He has this incredible discipline. He's working at his standing desk for five hours every day, period – and this work ethic speaks to his total devotion to his craft.'

The fact that at 90 Williams still adheres to this regime – in addition to conducting concerts, touring and recording – is remarkable, to say the least. Anne-Sophie Mutter, for whom Williams has composed his Second Violin Concerto (2021), believes that he's driven by what she describes as 'his relentless search for the perfect musical solution', and says that being a part of that process is humbling. 'He's so deeply and passionately involved with everything he writes, and is constantly crafting it to an even higher degree so that one day he might finally (hopefully!) be satisfied. The score to the new concerto was absolutely perfect from the beginning,' she assures me, 'but still he's constantly readjusting to what he might have heard in a rehearsal or concert.' Slatkin has had similar experiences. 'John is always very self-critical and self-effacing,' he says. 'I remember that every time I programmed one of his pieces he'd ask me if I really thought it was good enough. I guess that's why he's constantly revising. Maybe there's a little bit of Mahler and Bruckner in him?'

The new concerto for Mutter is Williams's largest yet, in terms of duration at least (it's 35 minutes in DG's recently



Williams the conductor: playing under him, says Ma, can be an unforgettable experience

issued recording premiere), and its emotional scope is matched only by the Cello Concerto. Indeed, there are striking similarities between the two works, in terms of both architecture and tone. But to my ears, the Second Violin Concerto takes a step beyond; I find its elegiac splendour sublimely poignant, and I see it as Williams's crowning achievement to date. The final pages are especially affecting, as the solo violin tries again and again to find a home in the orchestra's crepuscular key of A major.

'Yes, the ending is very personal, almost private,' Mutter says, 'and I find it such an honest and purely poetic way to conclude a work that also deals with great drama, sarcasm and wit. You know,' she adds, 'it's amazing how skilfully he writes without losing sight of the narrative or the expressivity of every single instrument in the orchestra.'

Unlike many other great contemporary composers, he really knows the personality and physiognomy of each instrument and what it brings to an orchestral score. So it's not just the quality of the musical thoughts themselves, but how he sets them for the instruments – he is second to none in that regard.'

Listening to the Second Violin Concerto alongside Ma's recent recording of the Cello Concerto is instructive. One of the most striking changes Williams made in the latter comes at the very end: there was a tragic sense of finality in the original version, with emphatic orchestral chords slamming the doors shut, as it were. There's darkness in the final moments of the recent revision, too, but also a glimmer of light – the 'hero' does emerge intact, as Ma put it, however bruised and battle-scarred. In the Second Violin Concerto, I don't hear the conclusion as a struggle for life or death so much as I hear it as a search for self-acceptance – for a sense of peace with the world and oneself.

In truth, each of Williams's concertos has something to offer, and each has enough subtleties and ambiguities to allow each listener to find their own connection with the music, to create their own narrative. Or, as Slatkin says: 'If film music is dictated by the visual element, then in concert music it's the listener who creates their own vision. Having said that, I don't differentiate all that much between his film music and his concert works. I hear too many threads that interact and I think they end up influencing each other. After all, they both come from the same soul.' **G**

► To read our reviews of the Violin Concerto No 2 with Mutter (DG) and 'A Gathering of Friends' (including the Cello Concerto) with Yo-Yo Ma (Sony), turn to page 52
To listen to James Jolly's exclusive podcast interview with John Williams, visit gramophone.co.uk

Alone with MESSIAEN

His decision to record
Vingt Regards in total
isolation allowed
Bertrand Chamayou
truly to immerse
himself in the work's
profound spirituality,
as he tells Tim Parry



Bertrand Chamayou's recorded catalogue is resolutely Romantic: Liszt, Ravel, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Franck, and a sparkling Saint-Saëns album that won *Gramophone's* Recording of the Year in 2019. But this is a pianist with an insatiable appetite for music of all kinds, and a sense of adventure that was evident from an early age. His new recording for Erato is of music that is especially close to his heart: Messiaen's *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*, one of the pinnacles of 20th-century French piano music.

This two-hour cycle was composed in a burst of inspiration during 1944, amid the turbulence and disruption that were ravaging Paris, a city on the brink of collapse in the final stages of German occupation. The immediate inspiration was the pianist Yvonne Loriod, whom Messiaen later married and who liberated his imagination, as he freely admitted. Messiaen's Catholicism underpinned much of his output, but rarely has such religious music been presented with such extravagant virtuosity, something that has drawn criticism but illustrates the composer's antipathy to what he described as 'insipid' sacred music.

'I was playing absolutely alone. Nobody was listening. I sometimes feel that I play my best when nobody else can hear me'

I ask Chamayou how old he was when he first encountered this work. 'I was very young,' he says, 'maybe nine or 10. Growing up in Toulouse, I had a neighbour who was a pianist – he was older than me and more advanced. He had a score library at home and I used to go round and look at the scores. My first big love was Ravel, when I was about eight. I saw the name of Olivier Messiaen many times – I had a book on the history of music that has his picture in it, and of course he was still alive at this time – and I was curious about this very modern music. My neighbour had the score of *Vingt Regards*, and I remember exactly which page I saw first.' I have my score in front of us and Chamayou opens it and finds the final pages of No 17, 'Regard du silence', where the density of the incessant interlocking chords, like Liszt on steroids except that it is all played *pianissimo*, is matched only by the accidentals in front of almost every note. Chamayou recalls the impression it made. 'What is that?, I thought. How will it sound? I was shocked, in a positive way. I was very attracted to complexity.'

Indeed, this bewildering complexity – the intricate figurations, dissonant chords, thickets of accidentals, and rhythms that depart from a conventional sense of metre – is one of the striking characteristics of *Vingt Regards*. So too is the sense of deep spirituality and rapt stillness that binds the work with its cumulative sense of

wonder. None of these things seems natural territory for a 10-year-old, no matter how precocious. But the music's language and modernity clearly appealed to the young Bertrand. 'At this time I wanted to be a composer,' he tells me. 'I was very attracted by new things, and by contemporary music. I asked my family if they could buy me a recording of *Vingt Regards* and for Christmas I got the recording by Michel Béroff. I listened to it, and I bought the score. I listened all day and all night and I tried to play whatever I could, just as I'd done with Ravel. Then I asked my parents for scores and recordings of Messiaen's orchestral pieces, and I listened to his music on the radio. I tried to compose in his style – I was composing fake Messiaen. I was only 10 but I was trying to imitate 1960s pieces like *Haikai* or *Couleurs de la Cité Céleste*, pieces for small ensemble. I have been in love with so many different composers; some of these were especially important when I was a kid, and Messiaen is one of these. This musical world is completely familiar to me.'

Our conversation took place back in November, during a break in rehearsals at LSO St Luke's in London, where Chamayou was working with the LSO and François-Xavier Roth for a performance of Saint-Saëns's Second Piano Concerto at the

Barbican. I soon learned that in fact the Messiaen recording had not yet happened, which took me by surprise as it was due for release in just a few months' time. He was scheduled to record it two weeks later, in

a church he had recorded in before, just 30 minutes from his home in Paris, and we agreed to have a follow-up conversation after that. But things didn't quite pan out as expected.

The recording – and this article – was meant to be out earlier this year. But, as Chamayou tells me later, many things went wrong. To start with, the church had no heating. In temperatures of less than 12 degrees Celsius the sound and balance were prepared while assurances were given that the situation would be fixed. Chamayou recorded two of the *Regards*, but then succumbed to the inevitable and decided it was impossible to continue. A search for an alternative location with suitable availability came up with the Maison de la Culture de Grenoble, commonly called the MC2, a 1000-seat hall in – appropriately but coincidentally – the city where Messiaen grew up. Chamayou was familiar with the venue: the solo pieces on his César Franck album (*Naive*, 9/10) were recorded there back in 2009. Everything was set.

Then Chamayou got Covid and had to postpone again. In the days running up to Christmas he at last made a fresh start, only to injure his left hand. In *Regards* Nos 12 and 13, there are many instances of a *fortissimo* chord cluster containing the three lowest notes on the keyboard (A, B flat, B natural), a percussive gesture that many pianists take with a closed fist for added impact.



Total dedication: making a recording is a labour of love for Chamayou, and the results speak for themselves – as witness his Recording of the Year in 2019 (below)

Chamayou's hand started to get hot and went red, and the following day was so swollen he couldn't use it. He was advised to rest the hand for two to three weeks, which meant a further postponement. He had by now set down five of the Regards, and new dates had to be found in February, again in Grenoble, to complete the recording. Other than that – and various technological mishaps along the way – everything went smoothly.

Actually, it genuinely did go well. One of the things I was curious about when we spoke back in November was how easy it would be to create the sense of **ethereal** atmosphere crucial to so much of this **music in** the forensic environment of a recording studio. Chamayou's initial response – in addition to saying that we should discuss this once **the** recording was done – was that he was **going to** record completely alone. He said he **had the keys** to the church (the original location), and **could** come and go as he pleased, and he **expected to** work into the night in total solitude. In **the hall** in Grenoble he worked in exactly this **way and** loved the process.

'The only other person there was the piano tuner,' Chamayou explains. 'He was in a different room, and I texted him when I needed him. I asked the sound engineer to prepare the machine so that I could operate it myself. I was playing absolutely alone. Nobody was listening. Playing on stage is very special, the electricity you get from the audience, but I sometimes feel that I play my best when nobody else can hear me.' I can't resist pointing out that amateur pianists the world over will nod with recognition at this last point.

Chamayou's method is to record long takes, sometimes several of them, and then choose the best one. There is **little** editing within each track – he might **splice in**

an alternative take of a section, but he avoids the kind of editing jigsaw common to many studio recordings. He takes his time,

with lots of listening, thinking and practising. He relates an instance from his Ravel album (Erato, 3/16), where he was unhappy with the producer's first edit of one of the smaller pieces, and a request for alternatives brought no

improvement. In the end he went back to the original takes and realised the producer had followed a certain path from the outset. The takes Chamayou liked were in a slightly different tempo, and so would not fit and were discarded. He rebuilt the **edit from scratch**. 'From that moment I became a little bit of a **control freak**,' he admits.

But did such an isolated environment bring its own challenges? Chamayou says it took some getting used to, and for the first day he felt unsure about it, but he soon started to enjoy the experience. 'I felt totally free,' he says. 'I could repeat things over and over, when a producer might have stopped me, and I was able to record late into the night. I liked it very much. I knew so clearly

what I wanted to achieve; maybe if I was less sure it would have been more difficult.'

I wonder if any specific Regards were particularly difficult to set down, or to pinpoint a definite performance he was happy with. 'Yes, the first one,'

Chamayou says. This opening piece establishes the devotional quality of much of the music with a calmness and breadth that sets out the work's scope. Chamayou takes it faster than the composer's exceptionally slow tempo marking. 'It's faster than what's written on the score,'

Chamayou agrees, 'but slow compared to Loriod. When you think of Loriod and Roger Muraro and Pierre-Laurent Aimard, they all worked with Messiaen himself and they all use different tempos. This is proof that you can have some freedom. I think it's

'As a child, I asked my family to buy me a recording of Vingt Regards. I listened all day and night, then tried to compose in his style – I was composing fake Messiaen'



a very personal thing. I wanted to create something very fragile here. I recorded this opening *Regard* with four or five different tempos, and for me this was the one that worked best.'

What about the more physical pieces? No 6 ('Par Lui tout a été fait', which Messiaen described as a 'big bang' following the opening 25 minutes of sustained calm) and No 10 ('*Regard de l'Esprit de joie*', which closes the first half with a blaze of virtuoso abandon) are notorious for their fearsome demands. 'I recorded the big physical ones with long takes, in sections,' Chamayou says. 'But long sections, maybe four or five within each piece. Most of the time I used complete takes of these sections. I recorded '*Regard de l'Esprit de joie*' in the evening and I thought I would be able to finish. I was in the middle of a very difficult section and I was unhappy with it. I was so tired that I decided to finish the next day. I went to bed worried that I wouldn't be able to find the same energy, the same fire and spirit, so this was probably the most stressful moment. But the next day it went so easily and I finished it quickly – it was the right decision.'

'There is an extension of time, like in Bruckner or Wagner. What makes it interesting is that it's almost totally blank – colourful but made up of a single colour'

He continues: 'For me it's not so difficult in a recording session to do highly virtuoso things with a lot of energy. What is often more difficult is to find the atmosphere of something that is very' – he searches for the right English word – 'nude, in a way.' This gets precisely to my earlier question about the challenge of capturing a rarefied atmosphere in a recording studio.

We talk about the penultimate *Regard*, No 19 ('*Je dors, mais mon cœur veille*' – 'I sleep, but my heart keeps watch'), which is music that needs enormous musical and emotional space for its effect. Messiaen has created this space over the preceding 100 minutes, so that the simplicity of the slow-moving, gently oscillating F sharp major chord – almost nothing else happens for long tracts of this piece – casts a unique spell. Chamayou compares it to the opening of *Rhinégold*, except that Wagner draws us into that world out of nothing. 'There is an extension of time', he says, 'just as you get in Bruckner or Wagner. It is pure beauty, but you have to be totally convinced by it. You must see it as part of something bigger, and not overplay it and try to find ways to make it interesting. What makes it interesting is that it is almost totally blank – it's colourful but made up of just a single colour.'

Messiaen felt acutely that he was writing religious music for an increasingly secular audience. Yet as many observers – both musical and religious – have pointed out, music that takes you outside of yourself, that is mystical in its rapt spirituality, is music for everyone. You don't need to be religious to be transported by it. Without wanting to draw Chamayou on his own personal faith, I wonder whether he feels that this spirituality is universal. 'Absolutely,' he says. 'This is a kind of spirituality that does not belong only to religion. I cannot totally explain it, but I have always been attracted to cycles like Liszt's *Années de pèlerinage* [which he has recorded – *Naïve*, 3/12] and *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* [which he plans to record], which have this sense of the spiritual.' I suggest that there is a direct link between the high point in the *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, '*Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude*', and Messiaen's *Vingt Regards*. 'Definitely,' he enthuses.

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'Right down to the tonality.' F sharp major was a key of special significance for Liszt, just as it was for Messiaen.

Chamayou has been occupied with another Messiaen project – an album of songs with Barbara Hannigan, to be issued by Alpha probably late next year. 'We are very close,' he tells me. 'When we have new things to work on, we go somewhere out of Paris, rent a house and work together for at least three or four days. We work, and we cook together. It's an immersive process. We did this for *Chants de terre et de ciel*, which we recorded last summer. Next we will work intensively on the *Poèmes pour Mi* and perform it at the Festival Messiaen and then record it in November. We plan on staying in Messiaen's summer house in Pétichet, near Grenoble, which is owned by the Fondation Olivier Messiaen. Messiaen's piano is still there and this is where he composed both these works.'

Barbara Hannigan confirms a very special bond: 'I first met Bertrand through the Labèque sisters, at an event in 2015. The first time I heard him play, I was backstage, and I listened to this sound – I had never heard anything like it, the most incredible liquid sound. Then we sat and talked and it became clear that we were both crazy about cooking. Food and cooking for each other has become part of our friendship. He has this immense generosity of sound, a fluidity combined with this power that's always there, whether he is showing it or not. One of the most special things about him as a musician is his sound. It's very vocal, very lyrical.'

She continues: 'Last year, we went to a small area near Châteauneuf de Grasse, in the south of France, to rehearse the first material for the Messiaen album, which was also for a recital, and we were at the house of my mentor Reinbert de Leeuw. Reinbert passed away in 2020, and we were rehearsing there in this special space where I had spent a lot of time. We were making music and cooking and shopping for food and talking ... You get everything with Bertrand, you really feel the complete person.' In Paris in the autumn, in Hannigan's role as conductor, they will perform Messiaen's *Oiseaux exotiques* for piano and small orchestra, and she confided in him that she was apprehensive. 'I explained to him that I have never worked as a conductor with piano soloists before, and they are not breathing instruments. He said, "Don't worry, I'll teach you." So Bertrand is going to be my piano concerto mentor guy.'

My conversation with Chamayou turns to his own festival, which he established in 2021 – Festival Ravel, set in the Basque region in the southwest corner of



For Chamayou, *Vingt Regards* has a universal spirituality that does not belong only to religion

'The first time I heard him play, I was backstage, and I had never heard anything like it – it's the most incredible liquid sound, very vocal, very lyrical' – Barbara Hannigan

France just a few miles from the Spanish border, the area where Ravel was born. 'I love this place,' Chamayou begins. 'My family had a summer house there and I went often in my childhood. So many musical stories happened there that nobody knows. Debussy spent his final years there, Albéniz died there. Jacques Thibaud had a house there, and Chaliapin lived there for 20 years. There are so many musical reference points, and 100 years ago many musical and artistic encounters happened there. It is now such an attractive place for tourists: many people from Paris, Toulouse, Bordeaux and Spain have houses there and sometimes spend half the year there. Yet despite this potential audience, there was nothing to do, so I decided to try something. We founded this festival last year with 40 concerts, with big orchestras like the Orchestre de Paris. This year we will welcome the Czech Philharmonic with Semyon Bychkov, and François-Xavier Roth is coming with *Les Siècles*. It's becoming one of the most important festivals in France.'

This is no small achievement. It's a shared endeavour, of course, and Chamayou enjoys new challenges and organising events not only for himself but for other people. He is an extremely sociable person, and such collaborations – with this festival, and also with such intensive partnerships with friends and fellow musicians as we've seen – strike me as a vital contrast to the solitary aspects of being a pianist.

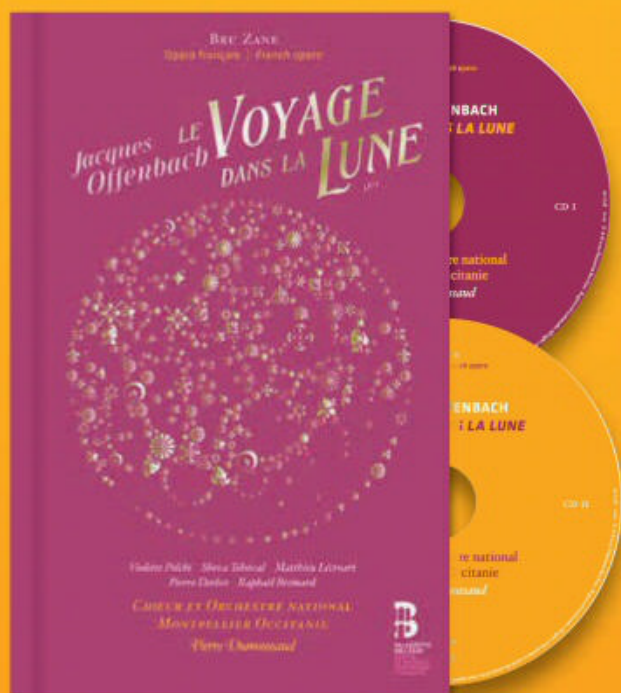
Chamayou also has a young family – as I'm reminded when his children arrive home from school during our final Zoom conversation and he apologises for the excitable noise in the background. Music education has always been important to him. Festival Ravel boasts a music academy for young people, with 66 students last year receiving high-level tuition. In addition, Chamayou tells me that for 2023, as well as the main festival in late summer, he is thinking of starting a small festival in the spring dedicated to children. 'I want an experience that is different from playing for schools,' he says, 'or from a festival where there might be just a single concert with *Carnival of the Animals* or *Peter and the Wolf*. So now I am working on a project to find new ideas for what to do for children, like a four- or five-day festival just for kids and young families, with activities they can participate in, mostly musical but with exhibitions, stories and things they can get involved in. Hopefully the kids we have today will be the audiences of tomorrow in the main festival.' Now there's a vision we can all share. **G**

► To read our review of Bertrand Chamayou's *Vingt Regards*, turn to page 69



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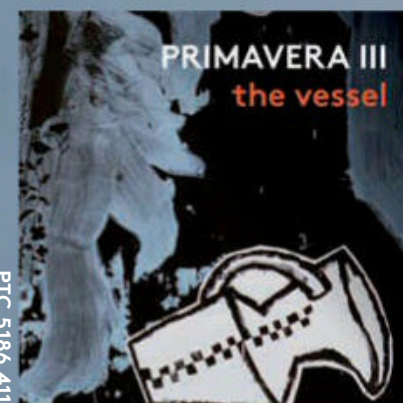
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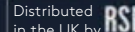
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RISING TENOR

Freddie De Tommaso made waves when he stood in for an indisposed colleague at Covent Garden but, as Hugo Shirley discovers, this British-Italian tenor is here to stay

Operatic history is sprinkled with such remarkable stories: the Royal Opera's Cavaradossi was struck down with an indisposition after Act 1 of *Tosca* and was replaced by another tenor who went on to bring the house down. In so doing, said tenor became the first British singer to perform the role at Covent Garden in six decades, as well as the youngest tenor ever to sing the part on the famous stage, a few days before he was scheduled to make his appearance in the role.

The tenor was Freddie De Tommaso, now 29. 'That was a pretty exciting evening,' he says when we speak over the phone in early May, the English part of his British-Italian background manifesting itself in a tendency towards understatement. 'Our cast wasn't due to open for another couple of days and we'd had our stage and orchestra rehearsal in the morning. I'd had lunch, done a bit of shopping, and I thought I'd hang around to see a friend who I knew was going to watch the performance. That's when I got the call: "Is there any chance you're near Covent Garden?" "Yeah," I said, "actually, as it happens, I am!"'

How much notice did they give him? 'None at all! It was the interval already. So I quickly put the wig on, put the costume on and got out there. The one slightly

nerve-racking thing was that we'd only chatted through Act 3; I hadn't actually done it. The old heart was going like the clappers! The reaction of the public was unbelievable, in the literal sense – I couldn't believe it. It was very, very special.'

But it wasn't just the headline-grabbing last-minute substitution that caught the critics' attention. Reviewing one of De Tommaso's scheduled appearances in the magazine *Opera*, Rupert Christiansen noted 'a voice reminiscent of the young Giuseppe Di Stefano', praising his 'superbly schooled technique – firm breath control, the tone glowing, the sound steadily and fluently produced'. And previously, following an earlier Royal Opera appearance by the tenor in December 2019 as Cassio in *Otello*, Richard Fairman wrote in the *Financial Times*: 'Freddie De Tommaso sang so vividly that Cassio for once became a character who gets noticed.'

Indeed, De Tommaso has clearly made a habit of getting noticed, not least by Decca, who signed him in January last year; he released his debut album, 'Passione', a few months later. This



Tommaso's stand-in ROH Cavaradossi hit the headlines

selection of Neapolitan songs was dedicated both to his tenor inspiration, Franco Corelli, and to his late father, another Franco, originally from Puglia. It shot straight to the top of the classical charts. 'I was so happy to do all those Italian and Neapolitan songs,' he tells me. 'So often a tenor's first album would just have 12 or 15 arias on it which everyone's heard a million times, and honestly it can be a bit boring. So I hoped that putting out an album of songs – some of them relatively unknown – would be a refreshing change for the public.'

His new album, 'Il tenore', released on June 24, ostensibly looks like a more conventional affair, but in fact features whole operatic scenes alongside hit arias – including the perhaps inevitable 'Nessun dorma'. What's especially eye-catching is the array of guest singers joining him – all great friends,

De Tommaso tells me. The young Russian mezzo Aigul Akhmetshina is featured in extracts from *Carmen*, soprano Natalya Romaniw joins him for the Act 1 duet from *Madama Butterfly*, while a certain Lise Davidsen steps into the fray for

chunks of *Tosca*. 'Yes, the incredible Lise Davidsen,' he says when I mention her.

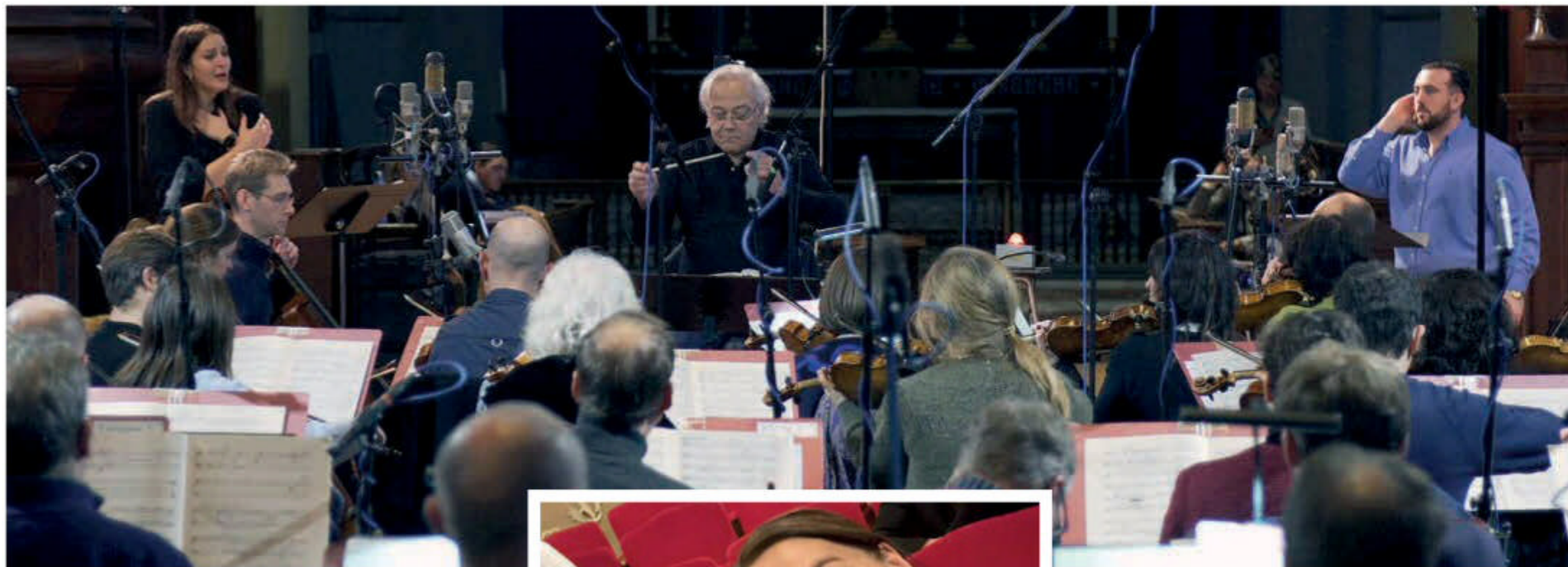
He and the Norwegian soprano share not only a record label but also a manager, and they have

recently performed in concerts together. Staged opera with her is on the horizon, too, he tells me. Anything he's able to tell us about? 'Not yet, I don't believe,' he says, through gritted teeth. 'TBC,' he adds with a laugh. Presumably Italian repertoire, though, I venture? 'Yes – no Wagner for me any time soon!'

Nor, despite the new album including excerpts from *Turandot*, is De Tommaso due to sing Calaf in the near future. 'There's nothing in the schedule yet, and I've said no to all the offers so far. Because once I say yes to that role, it'll close the door on some of the more lyric repertoire that I really want to sing first: Faust, Edgardo in *Lucia*, maybe even the Duke in *Rigoletto* in the right circumstances. Once you sing Calaf, the offers change, the *Bohèmes* won't come any more, which would be a shame.' He pauses briefly, adding, 'I've got plenty of time.'

He certainly does, and it's easy to forget quite how young De Tommaso is, quite how quickly he has shot to prominence – and in repertoire that one imagines many singers might be advised to avoid at his age, or would simply be ill-equipped to

'It was the interval already. I put the wig on, put the costume on and got out there. The old heart was going like the clappers!'



tackle. Does he see himself as atypical? 'I mean, it does seem a little atypical,' he says, 'but I think if we look to the past a little bit, it was more usual for tenors – *lirico spinto* tenors – to start to sing this repertoire earlier, and I've just gone for the repertoire that is right for my voice.'

'It's important to make sure you don't take on anything too heavy too early,' he adds. 'But at the same time, if you try to sing things that are on the lighter side for your voice, you can end up constricting it and not singing as well as you could. It's an ongoing conversation I have with my agent and my teacher – just trying to find things that fit me best at the current point.'

Those concerned that this young star will burn out too soon should feel reassured, then; and in conversation, it's difficult to imagine the affable, easy-going De Tommaso being any further away from the cliché of the hotheaded, impulsive tenor of the popular imagination. Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that, as I discover, he might never have been a tenor in the first place.

Raised in Tunbridge Wells, the young De Tommaso was exposed to opera early on. It would be playing in the car, and his father, a restaurateur, played it in his restaurant. A first trip to Glyndebourne came at age 11, and, shortly after, there was a trip to Covent Garden to see, appropriately enough, *Turandot*. He can't remember it at all, he admits, but was able to look up the cast when he found the ticket stub in a recent clear-out. 'On that evening, Vladimir Galouzine was singing Calaf, so I have that somewhere in my subconscious, which is very cool indeed!'

He discovered singing as a pupil at Tonbridge School and sang in the chapel choir. It's hard to imagine his voice blending into such a traditional choral context, I say, before he reveals that, when his voice broke, he started off as a bass. 'I was very happy about it at the time,' he explains, 'because my best friend was – and still is – a true bass, so I was able to stand in the bass section alongside him.' And then the voice began its steady ascent. 'I started as bass two, then went up to bass one, and then I was a tenor two, where I settled for a while – so kind of in the baritone department.'

It was as a baritone that he took lessons at school and for the first year and half at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM). He's in good company, I suggest, as a tenor starting off that way. 'It seems to be how the more robust tenor voices start off,' he



Recording *Il tenore* with Lise Davidsen, a close friend

agrees. 'Bergonzi did it, for example. I think they just need a couple more years of sitting in that place before the tenor stresses begin.'

For De Tommaso, those 'tenor stresses' began in a lesson halfway through his second year at the RAM, when his teacher, Mark Wildman, decided to put his voice to the test. 'We would normally warm up with scales and arpeggios that would go up to an F sharp or G, to the top of the baritone range – my high notes had become something of a forte for me. Then one day he just went up another semitone. I sang that arpeggio, and another one, and another one, all the way up to the high C, which I'm fairly sure I split right down the middle! I tried it again and half-managed

to hold on to it. And then he said something along the lines of, "Yes, we've got some things to think about."'

He sang for some of the tenors on the RAM staff (Dennis O'Neill, Ryland Davies and Richard Berkeley-Steele), who all confirmed that his teacher was on to something. 'And that was it, really! We went very slowly, very carefully at first, because it's a big old change, especially moving your *passaggio* [where the voice shifts between registers] up. It required a lot of patience and hard work, and there were certainly days when I wanted to bash my head against the wall and go back to being a baritone. And then there were other days when I thought: "Oh god, yes, this is fantastic, I've cracked it!"'

From the undergraduate course he went straight on to the RAM opera school, and during his studies he performed in Peter Brooks's distilled *La tragédie de Carmen* as well as in scenes from *Werther* and *La bohème*. He also did a fair amount of concert work: *Elijah*, the Verdi Requiem and, perhaps more surprisingly, Haydn's *The Creation*. 'I'm not sure if that was strictly the best,' he adds with a laugh, 'but I did it anyway.' It was during his first year at opera school that he had a major breakthrough, sweeping the board at the 2018 Tenor Viñas international singing competition in Barcelona – winning the First Prize, the Plácido Domingo Tenor Prize and the Verdi Prize.

Clips from the competition on YouTube reveal the then 24-year-old singing with astonishing refinement and vocal maturity, and it's no surprise that the enquiries came flooding in. 'It kickstarted everything,' De Tommaso says. 'As a result of the competition I got an agent and also a lot of offers of work. But

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I was aware that I had no experience of singing a main role in a big theatre.' So he opted to spend a year in the studio of a major opera house, in this case the Bavarian State Opera in Munich.

Now, just four years after his competition success, he has multiple important performances in major theatres on his CV: in Munich, at Covent Garden and at the Vienna State Opera (where he has sung in *Macbeth*, *Madama Butterfly* and *Carmen*). He made his debut at La Scala, Milan – singing Maurizio in *Adriana Lecouvreur* – in March this year, slightly later than planned after Covid struck. This summer sees further important engagements, with a certain emphasis on Verdi: the Requiem at the First Night of the Proms, *Un ballo in maschera* in Verbier, and *La traviata* at the Arena di Verona; further ahead, in November, he returns to *Macbeth* at the Vienna State Opera.

Indeed, Verdi is also among the ideas he's considering for his next album. 'We've not been able to have the meeting yet, and I don't know if Decca will have different ideas, but I've got a couple of thoughts. My big passion for *bel canto* and for Verdi will be something that I possibly look to, but we'll have to wait and see.' He expands on the subject: 'I want to sing as much Verdi as possible. It's different from singing *verismo*. You have to ...' – he searches for the right phrase – 'be a little bit stricter. The number one thing to remember is that it's *bel canto*; you must always sing in *bel canto* style: legato line, always on the breath, no veristic shouting. It has to be noble, and that's why in my opinion the greatest Verdi tenor was Bergonzi.'

Clearly the traditional art of singing as well as learning from and being inspired by great singers of the past are incredibly important to De Tommaso. He again mentions Corelli, whose voice he was introduced to by a housemate while at the Royal Academy. 'One day he just said, "Hey, Fred, listen to this,"

Performing in (from left, clockwise) *Carmen*, *Macbeth* and *Butterfly* in Vienna

and I was hooked.' But several other names crop up in our conversation, too. 'I'm a great lover of the tenors of that era, and of the era that preceded it. So, from the 1950s and '60s, it's Corelli, Del Monaco and Bergonzi, as well as Di Stefano and Daniele Barioni, who was singing a lot at the Met in New York when Corelli and Del Monaco were singing there. And then, from the era before, there's Pertile and Gigli – and, of course, Caruso. There's something about that old-school sound that really does it for me!'

Our conversation also covers some of the great baritones that De Tommaso has worked with, including such distinguished Verdians as Ludovic Tézier and Luca Salsi: 'Those guys are the real deal,' he says, 'they're incredible.' And I wonder aloud whether we're seeing a new era of bigger voices able to tackle this repertoire. 'It seems bizarre to me', he says, 'that there weren't so many in the last decades. But hopefully we'll reverse that and there'll be more to come.'

He ponders further. 'I'm wondering about what we said about the bigger tenors starting off as baritones. Maybe some of them with massive potential started off as baritones and then thought, "Well, yeah, this is fine!" – and just stayed as baritones. Without my teacher, there's no way I would have thought I was a tenor!' **G** Freddie De Tommaso's new album, *Il tenore*, is reviewed next issue



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RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Harriet Smith applauds an extraordinary and revelatory album of Ravel from Les Siècles and François-Xavier Roth, including the two piano concertos with Cédric Tiberghien



Ravel

Two Piano Concertos^a. Don Quichotte à Dulcinée^b. Deux Mélodies hébraïques^b. Pavane pour une infante défunte. Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé^b. Sainte^b

Cédric Tiberghien *pf*^b Stéphane Degout *bar*

^aLes Siècles / François-Xavier Roth

Harmonia Mundi (HMM90 2612 • 74' • T/t)

Every now and again accounts of Ravel's concertos come along that set new standards: the G major from Michelangeli and Gracis in 1957 (Warner, 1/58) and from Argerich and Abbado in the 1960s (DG, 2/68); then, in the mid-1990s, both concertos from Zimerman and Boulez (DG, 2/99). And, despite a plethora of other outstanding readings, here's another game-changer.

That is as much down to François-Xavier-Roth and Les Siècles (an ensemble that next year celebrates its 20th birthday and whose period-instrument timbres have shed fresh light on repertoire from Berlioz to Stravinsky) as it is to Cédric Tiberghien. He brings his chamber-musical sensibilities and a Gallic suavity to every bar he plays and the piano, a Pleyel from 1892, is gloriously well chosen, the glissandos coming off with ease, while the relative translucency of the lowermost range is a revelation. But more of that in a moment.

From the first bar of the G major, what strikes anew is Ravel's originality in terms of instrumental combinations. Needless to say, my listening notes ran to dozens of examples, but I'm going to have restrict myself to just a few. These are the sort of performances that pull you back to the score, checking details you'd never fully noticed previously.



'The Presto is glistening and fast-paced but never in danger of losing control, the wind players enjoying their moments in the sun'



Cédric Tiberghien is meticulous and highly personal in Ravel's concertos

Tiberghien brings to the first movement a sense of playful energy, flexibility and an acute awareness of colour (for instance, in his dark-hued bass scales from 3'30", which have a lovely clarity to them), while passages such as the harp cadenza against sustained cello (4'29") have you revelling in Ravel's invention afresh. Tiberghien imbues the long solo-piano opening of the *Adagio* with such a confiding quality that you don't want it to end, but when it does, it's with the gentlest of flute responses, followed by equally subtle oboe and clarinet. Another highlight is the plangent cor anglais solo a little further on (from 6'18"), Tiberghien whispering the accompaniment. The *Presto* is glistening and fast-paced but never in danger of losing control, the wind players enjoying their moments in the sun, be it the jazzy E flat clarinet, trombone glissandos, shrieking piccolo or virtuoso bassoon. Throughout, Tiberghien is very much the glue holding the piece together and the cumulative effect is irresistible.

The Left-Hand Concerto is just as revelatory. The opening, which is so often reduced to a murky rumbling, here has the clarity of a finely restored Rembrandt, but that doesn't lead to any loss of atmosphere, the contrabassoon a superbly malevolent presence. Roth unerringly builds the sound to create an enormous – almost Wagnerian – crescendo, and when the piano finally enters, Tiberghien brings to his solo a strong sense of narrative, ranging in mood from vehement, to sorrowing, to determined. He observes every marking in the score but makes each phrase sound entirely personal, with the closing bars of the soliloquy truly *strepitoso*. Roth's way with the



Setting new standards: Les Siècles and François-Xavier Roth bring a clarity to Ravel that shines a light on the composer's unusual instrumental combinations

grandiloquent dotted orchestral theme that answers the piano (from 4'41") conveys a sense of a vast texture without undue heaviness, the timpani underlining the dotted rhythm with just the right degree of presence, and the mighty climax enhanced by shimmering triangle and tambourine. When Tiberghien re-enters it's beautifully musing; that emotional breadth, allied to an instrument that can purr in the depths and sound crystalline in the upper reaches, is potent indeed. Throughout, as in the G major, he's very much one of the gang, whether duetting with the cor anglais or responding to the sinister marching rhythms of trumpets and percussion. His virtuosity is understated but ever-present, and he brings to the final cadenza, emerging from the depths and heading upwards into the light, a billowing ease, making you forget entirely that his right

hand is silent. Magical too is the way the orchestra, led by strings, creep in so quietly that you almost don't notice, until the inexorable final moments, as jolting and shattering as I've ever heard them.

The programming works beautifully, too, with the G major followed by *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*, songs that echo its sound world, artlessly sung by Stéphane Degout, before moving to the sparer language of the *Deux Mélodies hébraïques*, 'Kaddisch' given a Cantor-ish directness, followed by 'L'énigme éternelle', suitably elusive. Even something as familiar as the Pavane, the palate-cleanser before the three Mallarmé settings, is given a refreshingly unsentimental reading by Tiberghien, the piano's natural warmth exploited to fine effect. After the Left-Hand Concerto there's one more treat in store, Mallarmé's 'Sainte', a song unfamiliar to me, in a

perfectly poised reading by Degout. Beautifully recorded, this is headily seductive and has Award-winner written all over it. But don't take my word for it – go and listen to it post-haste. **G**

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Edward Seckerson listens to concertos by John Williams:

'The revised Cello Concerto seems to me very Walton-esque, and I know Williams would be flattered by the observation' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 52**



Andrew Achenbach salutes a fine Vaughan Williams symphony cycle:

'Sinfonia antartica impresses by dint of its preparation, transparent textures and evocative atmosphere' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 53**

Coleman • Montgomery • Price

Coleman Umoja: Anthem of Unity **Montgomery** Soul Force **Price** Ethiopia's Shadow in America. Piano Concerto in One Movement^a

^a**Michelle Cann** pf

New York Youth Symphony / Michael Repper
Avie (AV2503 • 53')



Florence Price is fast becoming the flag-bearer for a whole new generation of

female African American composers. And she is also a wonderful example of how quality will out if champions such as Yannick Nézet-Séguin (his terrific recording of her First and Third Symphonies took us all unawares – DG, 11/21) are on hand to break the chain of neglect and obscurity.

This particular album is yet another example of a project in a sense fortified by the Covid pandemic, and the fact that it features a youth orchestra – New York Youth Symphony – is a heartening indication of innocent ears opening to both the undiscovered and the entirely new. They give it their all. Price's *Ethiopia's Shadow in America* (recorded for the first time by an American ensemble) is a fitting foundation for the programme, its focus not so much on the indefensible reality and inhumanity of slavery as the enduring spirit to rise above it. For sure, its first pages are marked with a cry of anguish across the entire orchestra – but a nobility of utterance shines through them and it isn't long before the emergence of a simple Spiritual (in the second section of the piece) finds solace in a solo cello and aspiration in its journey from solo oboe to balmy (and majestic) horns. And don't for a moment think that a cakewalk is a somehow inappropriate conclusion to what has gone before, because this is the music that Price knew and found joy in. It was something to be celebrated.

Turning to the other Price opus featured here, the *Piano Concerto in One Movement*

(1934), it is once again striking that the Europeanisms are set against tunes with a distinct flavour or 'ache', you might call it. She celebrated and ennobled music of the African diaspora; the simple and homespun grow mighty in her music. Again we have a slow movement where the tune (or 'Spiritual') is very much the thing. And where there is singing, there is dancing. The finale is pure ragtime and these young players, under Michael Repper's enthusiastic direction, seem instinctively to feel its origins: earthy and a tad awkward. The piece all but belongs to pianist Michelle Cann, who gave its New York and Philadelphia premieres.

The other two composers, Valerie Coleman and Jessie Montgomery, speak a musical language more in tune with the 'currency' of their performers. Indeed, Montgomery is an NYYS alumna. Her *Soul Force* (2015) is very now. Soul and hip hop are there – in the subtext if not in the foreground (bodily rhythms are writ large in the percussion) – and a more assertive big-band jazz, which drives its mounting affirmation, has the ring of Ellington's *Harlem* about it. The inspiration comes from Martin Luther King, who spoke of 'meeting physical force with soul force'. Just so.

Coleman's *Umoja* takes the Swahili word for 'unity' and makes a kind of tribal unity of it. The piece is born of a simple song for women's chorus – Appalachian in style and inflection – and in its orchestral incarnation the song becomes songful. As with Montgomery's piece, it grows in fervour with the acquisition of colour and rhythm until a communal joyousness is communicated. The means may have been different but the path to affirmation is really not so far removed from what Florence Price was doing nearly a century before. **Edward Seckerson**

Debussy

La damoiselle élue. Le martyre de Saint-Sébastien – Fragments symphoniques. Nocturnes

Melody Louledjian sop **Emanuela Pasqu** mez

Maîtrise de Radio France; Radio France Philharmonic Orchestra / Mikko Franck
Alpha (ALPHA777 • 69' • T/t)



The Debussian sensibility is writ large here. One can trace a line of succession from

the 'Sirènes' of *Nocturnes* via Mélisande all the way to the diaphanous lovelorn maiden of *La damoiselle élue*. This 'little oratorio in a mystical and somewhat pagan tone' (Debussy's words) sets the poem 'The Blessed Damozel' by Dante Gabriel Rossetti for a bevy of female voices, collective and solo, the tone poetic and elusive and, well, diaphanous (that word again), the harmony seductive in its consonance even when it's not. These maidens are sirens of a more benign nature, conjuring images of Pre-Raphaelite luxuriance, fragrant and exotic and dare I say precious in ways that only this composer could.

The music is a good fit for Mikko Franck and his French Radio forces. The key to their success, I think, is clarity – plus, of course, an inbred feeling for the music's distinctive inflection and colour. The paradox with Debussy is that so-called Impressionism requires the keenest definition and transparency. And that's what Franck gives us in *Nocturnes*: 'Nuages' is very 'present', cor anglais and bassoon tracing those cumulus outlines with just the right degree of hypnotic seductiveness; 'Fêtes' is all about articulation, the colourful procession coming vividly into focus as it advances because for once Franck ensures that the leaping string counterpoint (which gives it uplift) is not swamped by the side drum and trumpets. 'Sirènes', as I say, hearkens back to the diaphanous but for me the voices are way too present (or, to use modern parlance, 'in your face') in the recording balance so that we lose that sense of them insinuating their way into our hearing, coming and going as they do on



From the undiscovered to the entirely new: New York Youth Symphony are heartfelt advocates for music by three African American female composers

salty sea breezes. Surely they should sound a little vague, mystical and fatalistic?

The final selection here is the most interesting and/or contentious. Debussy's incidental music to *Le martyre de Saint-Sébastien* (and I remember Michael Tilson Thomas admitting to being borderline obsessed with it, performing and recording it in its entirety with narration from Leslie Caron) is something that one can't imagine anyone but Debussy even daring to attempt. The contentiousness comes with the apposition of the hieratic and the voluptuous – or to put it another way, the sensuous rapture simmering just beneath the surface of the music. The agony and the ecstasy. The four Symphonic Fragments capture something of that illicitness in their barely repressed sexiness. The 'Danse extatique' may be muted (as witness the plangent solo trumpet) but it is ecstatic, as is 'La passion'. The understatement somehow accentuates its X-rated demeanour. But then again, the final two minutes of 'Le bon pasteur' are quietly ravishing in ways it's hard to put into words. **Edward Seckerson**

Ghedini • Malipiero • Casella

Casella Notturmo e tarantella, Op 54

Ghedini L'olmeneta^a Malipiero Cello Concerto

Nikolay Shugaev, ^aDmitrii Prokofiev VCS

Rostov Academic Symphony Orchestra /

Valentin Uryupin

Naxos (8 574393 • 55')



There are passages in Gian Francesco Malipiero's 1937 Cello Concerto that sound as if they might have come from a composer of the English pastoral school – particularly in the modal harmonies and winding melodies of the opening *Allegro moderato* and the central *Lento*. The finale comes as a surprise after such overwhelmingly lyrical writing, beginning rather like a car motor that won't quite turn over (and aided by percussive jolts from the snare and bass drums). This leads to an extensive cadenza whose insistent chords have something of the earthiness of Kodály's Solo Sonata, Op 8, and the movement is more than half over when the engine finally starts purring (around 3'17").

Malipiero's work is attractive enough, although it lacks the imaginative, memorable character of cello concertos by, say, Finzi or Moeran. Giorgio Federico Ghedini's double concerto *L'olmeneta* ('The Elm Grove') from 1951, on the other hand, deserves wider attention. The composer described its mood in autumnal images – an old farmhouse set among elm trees deeply rooted in 'soil on whose surface the golden colours of innumerable autumns have built up and darkened'. One hears the entangled

roots at the start in a passage that evokes the sonorous elemental Prelude to Wagner's *Das Rheingold*. There's a pastoral tone in *L'olmeneta* as there was in the Malipiero but it's one that's distinctly less sweet, with soft yet insistent harmonic friction that is perhaps meant to make audible the soil darkened by decay.

L'olmeneta is cast in four movements that last a good half-hour in total, although only the very brief second-movement hunting scene moves quickly. This is followed by an expansive and delicately scored *Molto adagio* full of long shadows and lyrical ache (I hear echoes of Shostakovich and Britten in it). The finale has some marvellous moments, too – listen, say, at 1'41", where the cellos move in tandem over shifting chords in a manner that's not so far in spirit from late Sibelius. Ghedini's voice is his own, mind you, and in its language and colouring *L'olmeneta* casts a subtle yet powerful spell.

Alfredo Casella's *Nocturne and Tarantella* (1934) serves here as a sweetly scented encore. Nikolay Shugaev is an eloquent soloist in all three works, he and Dmitrii Prokofiev are well matched in the Ghedini, and the Rostov Academic Symphony Orchestra provide sensitive support throughout under the direction of Valentin Uryupin. Strongly recommended, then, for Ghedini's concerto; its unique atmosphere continues to haunt me.

Andrew Farach-Colton

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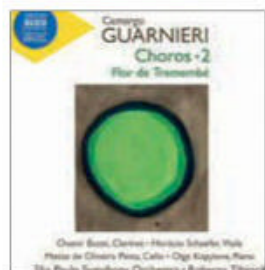
Four Chôros. Flor de Tremembé

Ovanir Buosi *cl* Horácio Schaefer *va* Matias de

Oliveira Pinto *vc* Olga Kopylova *pf* São Paulo

Symphony Orchestra / Roberto Tibiriçá

Naxos (8 574403 • 70')



In the sense meant by the old phrase 'a painter's painter', Camargo Guarnieri is

'a composer's composer'. His music grabs hold of you, impels you, pushes you hither and thither, but you feel no resentment: quite the opposite. So consummate is his technique that you want to follow him, Pied Piper-fashion.

Chôro for clarinet and orchestra (1956) is a perfect example of this. The listener is seduced by the magical orchestration, lulled by the sensual melodic style (Gershwin will certainly come to mind) and exhilarated by the rhythmic intrigue. The listening composer feels the same but also wants to see the score to know exactly how he did these things. Without intending to resort to cliché, there is also that sense of dance, of physical movement – try the first movement of the *Chôro* for piano and orchestra (also 1956) and see if you are not drawn in by its swinging rhythm, before your ear is drawn by what Paulo de Tarso Salles describes in his booklet note as his 'elegant counterpoint'.

The latest work on the album is the *Chôro* for viola and orchestra (1975), an altogether more angular though not dodecaphonic piece. It explores more extreme emotional territory and is shot through with the beauty of melancholy, particularly in the middle movement, *Tristemente*. If viola players would take it up, as one might hope would be the result of this excellent recording, it would constitute a major addition to the literature for the instrument. There's some magical writing, too, in the *Chôro* for cello and orchestra (1961), notably the lyrical excursions in the central *Calmo e triste*.

The 'intruder' here is the lovely *Flor de Tremembé* (1937), which will certainly call to mind Villa-Lobos, as Salles notes, but Guarnieri is altogether a more consistent composer, while Villa-Lobos is something of a lottery – you are as likely to get a work of bizarrely imaginative genius as the feeling of a piece of chewing gum that never ends.

Performances throughout are thoroughly idiomatic and the four soloists genuinely seem to revel in the music. Roberto

Tibiriçá guides them through it with the sureness of one who knows the scores inside out, and the recording, made in the Sala São Paulo, is both clear and resonant.

Ivan Moody

Lee

'Voyages'

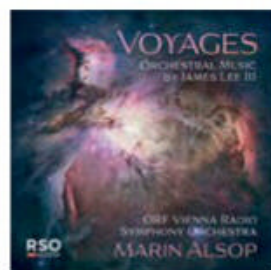
Beyond Rivers of Vision. Chuphshah! Harriet's Drive to Canaan. A Different Soldier's Tale.

Sukkot Through Orion's Nebula

ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Marin Alsop

Avie (AV2507 • 69')



James Lee III (b1975) is a master colourist.

His orchestration is dazzlingly vivid and

teems with detail – so much so that I occasionally found myself distracted from the music's substance by its sonic opulence and glitter. That said, there are passages where the sounds in their sheer beauty seem to have their own substance and meaning. Listen, say, at 6'15" in *Sukkot Through Orion's Nebula* (2011) to the clarinets' gauzy shimmer and then the woodwinds' woozy interplay that follows.

It's not just orchestral colour that Lee uses with uncommon skill; he also has a keen ear for harmonic colour, as is readily evident throughout '... and on the other side of the river ...', the third and final movement of *Beyond Rivers of Vision* (2005). I hear a hint of Messiaen's ecstatic religious sensuality in the opening section – Lee studied church music as well as composition and many of his works seem to have biblical or religious themes – although with a peculiarly American accent.

In *Chuphshah! Harriet's Drive to Canaan* (2011), Lee paints scenes from Harriet Tubman's life – her escape from slavery and her risky returns to the South to visit her beloved family – and while he employs quotations of Spirituals, hymns and other well-known tunes, these are fleeting and sewn into the fabric with a sense of care that results in a narrative effect that's worlds away from Ives's more chaotic allusive style.

For me, however, the *pièce de résistance* of this collection is *A Different Soldier's Tale* (2008), a substantial four-movement suite inspired by stories Lee's grandfather told him about fighting as a black soldier in the Second World War, for it's here that the composer's mastery of detail has the greatest emotional impact. Note, for example, the subtle evocation of marching feet at around 2'30" in 'Vigilant Patrol', the

opening movement. Marching or movement is also suggested at 2'05" in the second movement, 'I Must Survive!', although now in a way that's quite terrifying. Yet the finale, 'Celebration on Broad Street', is in some ways the most disturbing of all, for it's a rather harrowing depiction of a victory parade, complete with what sounds to me like a shrieking windstorm at the end.

The performances by the Vienna RSO under Marin Alsop are effective, although I'd like more ecstatic abandon in *Sukkot Through Orion's Nebula*, which Lee describes as a depiction of the second coming of God as he passes through Orion's Nebula. Strongly recommended nevertheless. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Mendelssohn • Sinding

Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, Op 64 Sinding

Violin Concerto, Op 45. Romance, Op 100

Lea Birringer *vn*

Hof Symphony Orchestra / Hermann Bäumer

Rubicon (RCD1081 • 61')



Here's something new, and I'm talking less about this being German violinist Lea

Birringer's debut concerto disc than the fact that her curtain-raiser is Norwegian composer Christian Sinding's Violin Concerto No 1 of 1898, followed by his Romance in D of 1910. It's an eye-catching opening gambit, first because Sinding's sizeable symphonic output (which includes two other violin concertos and four symphonies) has long been lesser-spotted repertoire, overshadowed during his lifetime (1856-1941) by his chamber works, then dropped post-war like a hot potato along with the rest of his music on account of his Nazi-sympathising final years. Second, because when 21st-century violinists have flown Sinding's flag at all, they've tended to hail from the Nordic regions – Sinding's countryman Henning Kraggerud offers a notably large discography, and most recently the Swedish violinist Johan Dalene produced a very fine *Suite im alten Stil* on his 'Nordic Rhapsody' chamber disc (BIS, 5/21). But now here is Birringer to rehabilitate two orchestral works showcasing Sinding's very distinctive melodic, late-Romantic language – one that's German-influenced yet also unmistakably darkly Nordic and folk-flavoured; and while the First Violin Concerto is most audibly haunted by the one Brahms wrote 20 years earlier (listen out for its contours and rhythmic

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fragments), Mendelssohn's E minor masterpiece makes for a hugely complementary partner with its own melodic lyricism and earlier Romanticism.

It's not just Birringer's programming that stands out, though. Beyond an attractively silky delivery, running by turns with liquid coolness or with sweeter or darker warmth, her readings strike for a gently expressive palette that feels, in the best possible way, decidedly old-world. For instance, one of the hallmarks of her Mendelssohn first movement is the amount of rubato, and the naturalness and rhythmic command with which she metes it out, genuinely both stealing time and giving back. Perhaps even more striking, though, is her array of portamento types, whether employed for specific effect or as a means simply of connecting two legato notes. For examples of both, head to her soulful central *Andante* in the Sinding Concerto; after which you could head to the recordings of Mendelssohn's and Brahms's friend Joseph Joachim to hear how the subtlety of Birringer's slides isn't entirely dissimilar to his own.

Add committed orchestral readings, making the most in particular of Sinding's colourful scoring and folkiness (by way of example there are some deliciously merrily twinkle-toed brass moments in his Concerto's final *Allegro giocoso*), and from every angle this is a concerto debut worthy of your time. **Charlotte Gardner**

Mozart • Birchall

Birchall Basset Clarinet Concerto^a Mozart
Clarinet Concerto, K622^b. Clarinet Quintet, K581^c
Michael Collins *basset cl/p^bcond^c* **Wigmore Soloists;**
^{ab}**Philharmonic Orchestra** / ^a**Robin O'Neill**
BIS (BIS2647) • 82'



Michael Collins favours unusual couplings for his recordings of

Mozart's Clarinet Concerto. His first recording (DG) was paired with Mikhail Pletnev's transcription for clarinet of Beethoven's Violin Concerto, controversial in some circles but not without its merits. His second (Chandos) featured Copland's gem of a concerto along with *Ornamental Air*, a work for basset clarinet composed for Collins by Elena Kats-Chernin. For this new recording, with his old band the Philharmonia, Collins goes basset clarinet all the way – Mozart's Concerto plus the Clarinet Quintet and a new concerto for him by Richard Birchall.

Collins's interpretation has changed little over the decades. He's slightly more leisurely today, particularly in the Rondo finale which, nonetheless, still has a nice skip to it, with brief pauses that seem to propel the action forwards in a playful way. The opening *Allegro* has an exuberant feel with a sense of fun between soloist and orchestra, which he also directs (as he did with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra in his second recording). Collins has always added tasteful ornamentation – for example, linking the semibreves in bars 216-19 (7'06") – and his decorations here are very similar to his Swedish account, apart from the brief cadenza in the famous *Adagio*, here much simpler. Collins is gloriously unhurried in this movement and the whispered *pianissimo* in the reprise of the big tune is breathtaking.

The main difference concerns the sound. Collins's tone is still rich and round (he plays a Peter Eaton basset clarinet here) but the chalumeau bottom notes have a softer, more velvety feel now. The recorded sound is important, too. The orchestra is more 'present' here – you can actually hear the flutes! – and the clarinet is placed very forward in the mix which, although it lessens the distinction in dynamics between *piano* and *forte*, allows for plenty of detail to shine through.

If you had to pick one Collins Mozart recording, it could well be the coupling that sways you. For the Mozart Clarinet Quintet, he is joined by the Wigmore Soloists, a recently formed, flexible ensemble taking their name from the chamber music temple where they often perform, Wigmore Hall. There's a real sense of friends making music together here and I can't offer higher praise. The string players seem to breathe with Collins so that everything seems organic. The *Larghetto* – surely a dry run for the concerto's *Adagio* – is heavenly.

Birchall, who has played with Philharmonia as a cellist since 2010, was inspired by the artworks of MC Escher in writing his Concerto for Collins. Its movements bear titles that hint at the artist's surreal drawings, such as 'Impossible Construction' for the third movement. As such, the music meanders in different directions that don't always seem to lead anywhere, although that third movement has its fair share of wit and whimsy. Birchall's Concerto does not have the same immediate appeal of the Kats-Chernin creation but it's attractive and engaging. **Mark Pullinger**

Mozart Clarinet Concerto – selected comparisons:

Collins, Russian Nat Orch, Pletnev

DG 457 652-2GH (7/00)

Collins, Swedish CO

Chandos CHAN10756 (3/13)

Piazzolla • Vivaldi

'The Mandolin Seasons'

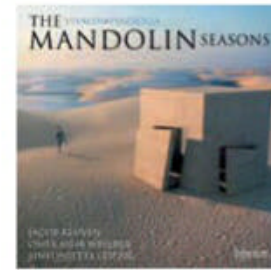
Piazzolla *Las Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas*

Vivaldi *The Four Seasons*

Jacob Reuven *mandolin* **Sinfonietta Leipzig** /

Omer Meir Wellber *accordion/hpd*

Hyperion (CDA68357 • 68')



It's always a boon when it's clear from the off that there's a real relationship at the

heart of a recording, and such is the case for the fascinating 'The Mandolin Seasons', recorded over three days in the Grosser Saal of the Leipzig Gewandhaus. However, I'm not talking about the obvious one between Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and Piazzolla's 1965 homage, *Las Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas*, but the one between its mandolin soloist Jacob Reuven and its accordionist soloist and harpsichordist Omer Meir Wellber. This pair have been musical collaborators since childhood, both of them hailing from the Israeli desert city of Be'er Sheva. The mandolin and accordion are the national instruments they learnt as schoolboys; and needless perhaps to say, the equal boon here is to hear Wellber wearing such a different musical hat to that of his usual symphonic conducting activities.

I don't use the word 'fascinating' lazily. Vivaldi's own mandolin concertos aren't his most interesting works. By contrast, though, Reuven's mandolin take on *The Four Seasons*' famously virtuoso violin solos presents a panoply of colours, thanks to a holy trinity of a modern instrument, his own mandolin technique, based on Europe's various violin schools, and shedloads of imagination. Listen to the shaping, shading and variety of his embellishments in the solos in the first movement of Vivaldi's *Spring*. And these qualities then equally feed his Piazzolla arrangements (each movement of which follows its corresponding Vivaldi one); the double-stopped glissandos with which he opens Piazzolla's *Summer* are properly exciting, for instance.

Then there's Wellber's accordion: never would I have dreamt that a solo accordion could bestow such a perfect darkness on the opening of the central *Largo* of Vivaldi's *Winter*, or that the combination of Reuven's hushed, shimmering mandolin textures and Wellber's steadier accordion tone would combine to such riveting effect in the first movement of *Autumn*. In fact, beyond Wellber's equally virtuoso accordion technique (the nuance of his

trills in Vivaldi's *Summer* first movement), it's his timbre and texture I find especially enjoyable. Take the addition of accordion to the ensemble texture in that same Vivaldi *Summer* movement, because it tints the sound quality to produce something that – bizarrely and brilliantly – sounds almost electric. Wellber's harpsichord improvisation is also fabulously creative, one great moment being his delicately dissonant raining scales at the end of Piazzolla's *Summer*.

It's not just Reuven and Wellber, either. There's also the subtle Latin rubato and directness of communication from cellist Moritz Klauk in his Piazzolla *Autumn* solo, the 18 Gewandhaus string players hanging off his every note as they accompany; and indeed, their own superglued playing brilliantly brings off other moments such as the concluding *Presto* of Vivaldi's *Summer*. Even the Grosser Saal gets to meaningfully contribute: the Vivaldian Spring ghosts from harpsichord and strings at the close of Piazzolla's *Spring* are show-stopping not just for the tension-flecked antiquity of the playing but for the way it suddenly sounds lost and echoing in the space.

In a steadily expanding catalogue of Vivaldi and Piazzolla *Four Seasons* offerings, this has brought something genuinely unique and worthwhile to the table.

Charlotte Gardner

Schumann

'The Complete Symphonies'

Symphonies – No 1, 'Spring', Op 38; No 2, Op 61; No 3, 'Rhenish', Op 97; No 4, Op 120

Munich Philharmonic Orchestra /

Pablo Heras-Casado

Harmonia Mundi (HMM90 2664/5 ② • 128')



Pablo Heras-Casado becomes the latest of his generation of conductors to record

a Schumann cycle. He has form in this repertoire, of course, having overseen recordings of the three concertos with Isabelle Faust (3/15), Jean-Guihen Queyras (5/16) and Alexander Melnikov (9/15). Those were with the period instruments of the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, while for the symphonies he has relocated to Munich and the slightly compromised acoustic of the city's Philharmonie im Gasteig ('burn it' was Leonard Bernstein's opinion of the hall).

Period manners aren't entirely jettisoned with the move to modern instruments. The booklet contains no list of players but it sounds as if the strings are slimmed down

from full Mahlerian proportions, the better to provide an appropriately mid-19th-century balance. And Heras-Casado has the measure of the music, locating the poetic inspiration behind the *Spring*, for example, and vividly charting the stages of the Third's Rhine journey. Tempos are kept pliable and mobile, with slow movements especially benefiting from flowing speeds.

Heras-Casado's concern is that the contrapuntal lines, the musculature of these works, is made audible. He plants his personality upon each symphony not via interpretative extremes but through the simple expedient of ensuring they are heard as clearly and plainly as possible. Here he is impeded by the less than ideal sound of the venue, the bass lines especially emerging without the definition achieved by, say, Thomas Dausgaard in his chamber-scale Swedish cycle – which is a pity in readings of such consideration and poise.

Schumann cycles are not exactly thin on the ground, and while nobody should be disappointed with this one, it is perhaps unlikely to displace current favourites, whether they be the personable virtuosity of Dausgaard in Örebro or Yannick Nézet-Séguin's Chamber Orchestra of Europe, or the sinewy, driven period-instrument cycle from John Eliot Gardiner. All the same, that's no reason not to be excited by the possibility of further Schumann recordings from Heras-Casado: there are still a few concerto-like and symphony-like works to be explored, not to mention a string of concert overtures, and thoughtful, stylish recordings of them are always to be welcomed.

David Threasher

Symphonies – selected comparisons:

ORR, Gardiner Archiv 457 591-2AH3 (6/98)

Swedish CO, Dausgaard

BIS BIS-SACD1519/1569/1619 (5/07, 5/08, 1/09)

COE, Nézet-Séguin

DG 479 2437GH2 (5/14)

Shostakovich

'Jazz & Variety'

The Age of Gold – Suite, Op 22a. Jazz Suite No 1^a.

The Limpid Stream – Suite, Op 39a. Suite for Variety Orchestra. Tahiti Trot

Singapore Symphony Orchestra /

Andrew Litton ^apf

BIS (BIS2472 ② • 69')



Shostakovich's well-developed sense of irony is so intrinsically wrapped up with his love of popular music – especially that which the Soviet establishment regarded as 'trivial' or better yet 'subversive' – that it's

sometimes hard to discern just how cynical or otherwise he's being in celebrating it. Andrew Litton brings an American's inbred feeling for popular song and jazz to these racy selections and as music director of New York City Ballet he instinctively 'gets' the footwork and physicality of the two featured ballets, not least in the keenness of articulation and rhythmic pizzazz that he and the Singapore Symphony bring to them.

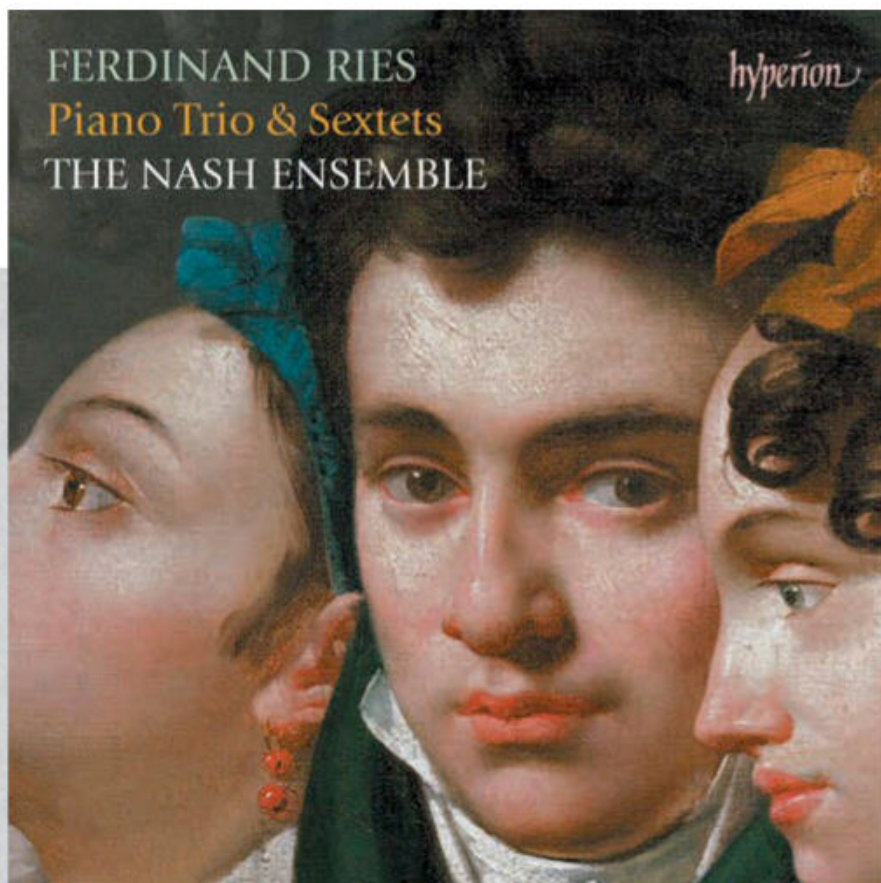
They are indeed easily assimilated into the sound, style and sheer audacity of what makes them unmistakably Shostakovian. Not that you'd naturally make the connection between football (it always pulls me up short) and Western decadence in the music of *The Age of Gold*. High-end parody and slapstick would seem to be the name of the game here, fuelled no doubt by a metaphorical abundance of English beer and loose women. When Shostakovich is feeling racy there's always a polka in the mix, and always a wonky xylophone (the end-of-pier variety) leading from the front. The raucous finale here is three-ring-circus time and brilliantly foreshadows the unexpected second and third movements of the Sixth Symphony.

But it's the central *Adagio* of the *Age of Gold* suite that digs deeper into the eroticism that unsettled the Soviet authorities. Soprano saxophone is nothing if not sexy, even when it's at its most plangent – and its gloriously sinewy melody (elaborated by solo violin) no doubt underpins one of those elaborate Tchaikovsky-inspired *pas de deux*, the intense cinematic climax strongly redolent of the discredited *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*.

The Limpid Stream is even more of an oddity – ostensibly a balletic hymn to agriculture and the heroic efforts of Soviet farmers in feeding the Motherland (even Putin couldn't make this up). What the suite offers, though, is the kind of divertissement of sweetmeats again suggestive of Tchaikovsky (albeit with added sauce). And again there is a rather gorgeous *pas de deux* led by the lush solo cello of the Singapore Symphony's Ng Pei-Sian.

The *Suite for Variety Orchestra* might prompt the rejoinder 'you're gonna need a bigger band' – and with four saxes, 10 brass, accordion and copious percussion Shostakovich duly obliges. There's a burst of his *Festive Overture* in Dance No 1 and more besides that is big and blowsy. The familiar *Suite for Jazz Orchestra* No 1 has more of a Weimar feel, with Bertolt Brecht hovering in the wings for the 'Foxtrot' with its banjo-strumming and cheesy Hawaiian guitar.

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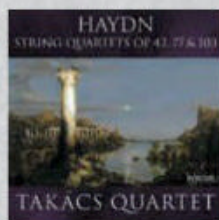
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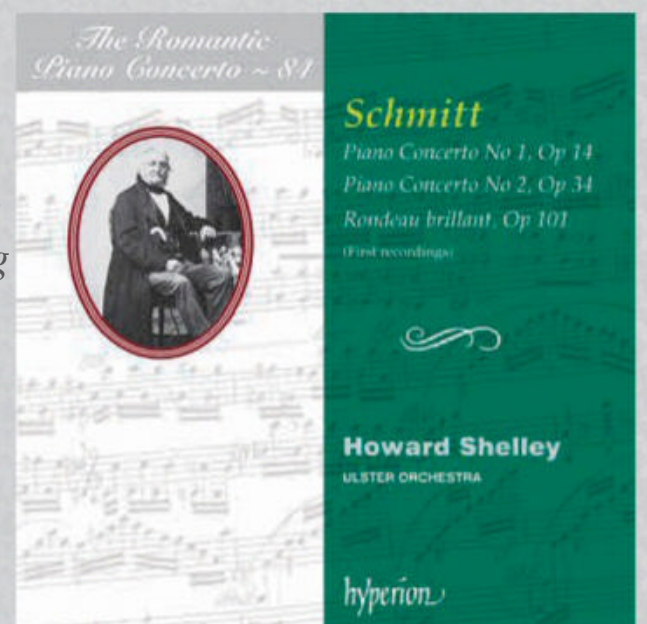
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^dYo-Yo Ma ^{vc}Yuja Wang ^{pf}Olivier Latry ^{org}
^{ade}Boston Symphony Orchestra; ^{bce}Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra / Andris Nelsons
 DG (486 2040) ⑦ • 8h 33



Andris Nelsons has just completed his Bruckner symphony cycle with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and has nearly reached the end of his Shostakovich survey with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Now he and his two orchestras are united in a bumper survey of Strauss's orchestral works, released on DG in one fell swoop. It's

a generous selection comparable to big boxes from the Staatskapelle Dresden under Rudolf Kempe and, more recently, David Zinman with the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra.

Beside the major orchestral scores, including *Metamorphosen* and the early *Aus Italien*, Nelsons includes only one concertante work, the *Burleske*, alongside a generous selection of music from stage works: the Suite, Fantasy and Symphonic Interludes from, respectively, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Die Frau ohne Schatten* and *Intermezzo*, plus the *Schlagobers* Waltz and *Salome*'s Dance of the Seven Veils. The repertoire is equally distributed between the orchestras, with some works assigned, as the booklet explains, for historical reasons; both ensembles come together for the *Festliches Präludium*, a rousing, rambling conclusion to the set.

Devoted Straussians – or Nelsons fans – will be familiar with the conductor's excellent Strauss recordings with the CBSO, released on three Orfeo CDs in the early 2010s (4/10, 6/11 and 6/14), and comparisons are instructive, especially with the shorter works. Generally speaking, we see an expansion of what was often already a leisurely approach. The opening *Salome* dance now breaks the 10-minute mark, for example, in a

performance where things remain simply too slow for too long, despite the conductor whipping up a storm at the conclusion.

Don Juan now lasts over 20 minutes (compared with 18 in Birmingham, or, by way of comparison, less than 16 in George Szell's classic Cleveland recording). The playing of the Gewandhausorchester is luxurious but unsurprisingly the result is somewhat flaccid, the love scenes more soporific than erotic, Don Juan himself sounding as if he's overindulged on the patatas bravas. Similarly, although much of *Till Eulenspiegel* is superb, especially in the second half, there could be more energy, rumbustiousness and incisiveness early on.

The *Rosenkavalier* Suite is disappointing, formless and slack when compared to the superb Birmingham account, and the *Intermezzo* Interludes suffer from Nelsons's slow tempos as well – he takes over eight minutes for an admittedly lovingly turned 'Träumerei am Kamin'. The *Feuersnot* Love Scene is more successful (why is this not programmed more regularly?). Things improve further with a blistering account of the *Burleske*; Yuja Wang presumably had some say in the tempos here, and her playing – alternating breathtaking razor-sharp virtuosity and seamless lyricism – is superb, even if she doesn't capture the same sense of mercurial wit as Bertrand Chamayou in his recent account (Warner, 6/21).

There's more star power in *Don Quixote*, but whereas Wang shakes things up, Yo-Yo Ma is happy to slot into Nelson's expansive musical world in an account that comes in just shy of 46 minutes – one of the slowest performances on record since, well, Ma's last one, also with the BSO (Sony, 7/86). There's certainly no doubting the charisma and technique on show, but it's a performance where soloist and orchestra seem too often to be fighting to be heard and where the unceasing intensity of Ma's playing quickly gets tiring. There are some fine moments – the climactic battle is powerfully done, and Ma briefly finds inner calm at the start of the finale – but in general the effect is too overwrought and overblown for me.

Happily, Nelsons really hits his stride in superb accounts of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Ein Heldenleben*, *Symphonia domestica* and *Eine Alpensinfonie*. Here, helped by the sheer sonic splendour of his orchestras (the first two works were recorded in Leipzig, the two 'symphonies' in Boston), the conductor's approach pays major dividends: there are a generosity and warmth here that are difficult

to resist, and he conveys the works' sense of symphonic structure compellingly.

Admittedly, I miss some of the sheer élan and energy of Nelsons's Birmingham recordings, and *Also sprach Zarathustra* here is certainly more measured (as well as two and a half minutes slower by the clock), but the more thoughtful pacing brings its own rewards in a patient – and gloriously played – 'Von den Hinterweltern' and an elegant, easy-going 'Tanzlied', even if I'm not totally convinced by Sebastian Breuninger's slightly tremulous violin solos.

There's an all-embracing confidence to *Ein Heldenleben* right from the start, with the battle consummately stage-managed and the conclusion movingly done (and there's excellent solo work from Leipzig's other First Concertmaster, Frank-Michael Erben). The all-important final minutes of *Eine Alpensinfonie* are superbly realised, too, with Nelsons inspiring playing of an intensity and emotional power that matches that of Karajan's classic account – my top choice in my Collection on the work (A/17) – crowning a deeply satisfying performance. *Symphonia domestica* is no less satisfying, capturing just the right balance of grandiloquence and fun, with the finale offering a real showcase for a BSO on boisterously virtuoso form.

Nelsons hits the bullseye, too, with outstanding performances of *Macbeth* and *Tod und Verklärung* – the former imbued with a gritty sense of purpose and forcefulness, the latter vividly descriptive and built up with a patient sense of inevitability – and the BSO sound superb in the *Frau ohne Schatten* Fantasy, its strange patchwork held together as well as one could hope by Nelsons. The Gewandhausorchester's strings imbue *Metamorphosen*, beautifully paced by the conductor, with a moving, melancholy glow. At the other end both of the aesthetic spectrum and of Strauss's career, the full orchestra floods *Aus Italien* with plenty of warm, Mediterranean sunlight.

Throughout, DG provides sumptuous engineering that matches the mellow sonic luxuriousness of this distinguished pair of ensembles, and the whole enterprise, the flimsy documentation notwithstanding, feels reassuringly expensive, even if DG's asking price for the seven-CD box is temptingly modest. Nelsons, as I've outlined, has several missteps, but there's enough here that's right – not to mention a great deal that's truly outstanding – to mean that the temptation is likely to be difficult for any Straussian to resist. **G**

The disc sounds great and Youmans's 'Tea for two' in the guise of *Tabiti Trot* (do Russians really dream of escaping to Tahiti?) – all dressed up in its plush art deco garb – is, of course, a good way of signing off. **Edward Seckerson**

Sibelius

Symphony No 7, Op 105. King Christian II, Op 27 – Suite. Pelleas and Melisande, Op 46 – Suite

Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Nicholas Collon

Ondine (ODE1404-2 • 65')



This is a rooted performance of Sibelius's last symphony from the

first non-Finn to lead the orchestra of the Finnish Broadcasting Company, one with true gravitas but little grandstanding. A touch more than the marginally slower Klaus Mäkelä on his recent Oslo recording (Decca, 4/22), Nicholas Collon has the symphony flowing like a deep river – perhaps something close to the river of lava long tapped in this score by Simon Rattle.

Everything is clear in Collon's recording but the moving parts heave despite the sure momentum, giving the discourse a visceral edge. The slight burgeoning of each note in the trombone motto, which blossoms but is traced more than declaimed, is indicative of the bigger picture: careful, sure but unobtrusive phrasing that moves the music on while conveying, especially in the final pages, the wrenching strain that is the essential precursor to that final, pained C major. Laura Heikinheimo's sound is ideal in conveying the sense of gravitational, inevitable progress.

The two sets of plaintive incidental music included here are astutely chosen. Don't think of them as fillers, but continuations of the idea of passing states of mind and further examples of the composer's concision and thrift. Sibelius was a master at setting the aural lighting for a scene or indeed an entire stage production. 'Élégie' from *King Christian II* and 'The Death of Melisande' from *Pelleas and Melisande* (an opaque response to Grieg's 'Death of Åse') need a special tenderness and space and get it but there are numbers in which Collon sounds absorbed by Sibelius's creation of miniature structural marvels. Rarely have I heard the 'Nocturne' from *King Christian II* come to fruition like a miniature Symphony No 2, nor its 'Ballade' sound like a little sister to *Pohjola's Daughter*.

But this is theatre music and Collon sacrifices no greasepaint in his pursuit of structural logic. Perhaps it's the cool finesse of the FRSO woodwinds, in particular, that succeed in drawing us into a sense of collective history in the old dances and old instruments (or imitations thereof) that characterise the music for *King Christian II*. It takes considered playing and extreme focus to reflect the ambiguities and fleeting emptiness of *Pelleas*. The broad bow strokes of 'At the Castle Gate', the steady withdrawal of 'The Death of Melisande' and the sinister lapping of 'At the Seashore' all speak of musicians well inside this music and determined to think patiently about its particular colours. Fine performances, yes, but also a comprehensive, watertight Sibelius album to cherish.

Andrew Mellor

Takács

Passacaglia, Op 73. Piano Concerto, Op 60^a.

Rhapsody, 'Ungarische Weisen', Op 49^a^b.

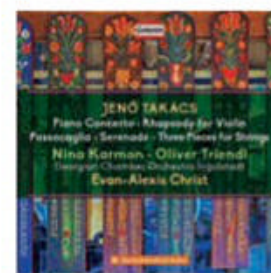
Serenade nach Alt-Grazer Kontratänzen, Op 83^b. Drei Stücke

^bNina Karmon *vn* ^aOliver Triendl *pf*

Georgian Chamber Orchestra, Ingolstadt /

Evan-Alexis Christ

Capriccio (C5438 • 66')



Active as a composer until his late nineties, Jenő Takács enjoyed a creative career almost

as long as that of his near-contemporary Elliott Carter. Born in the Hungarian town of Cinfalva (now Siegendorf in Austria) in 1902, Takács studied with Joseph Marx and Hans Gál and was inspired by Bartók, whose acquaintance he made in 1926, shortly before taking up professorial appointments in Egypt and the Philippines. The Rhapsody for violin and strings was composed in 1941 after his return to Europe and comprises a rhapsodic and slightly melancholic opening section followed by a fast-paced and witty conclusion, both incorporating Hungarian folk-music elements. It receives a performance of terrific aplomb by Nina Karmon, who includes a short cadenza commissioned from the cellist and composer Graham Waterhouse.

A very different mood is established by the Passacaglia for strings of 1960, based on the first movement of an unpublished piano sonata from two years earlier. The work's seriousness of purpose and suggestions of unease and grief make a strong impression. Completed in 1966, the

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

JOHN WILLIAMS'S CONCERTOS

Edward Seckerson enjoys exploring a less familiar side to John Williams, including music written for and played by two star instrumentalists



Musical soulmates: Yo-Yo Ma and John Williams celebrate many years of fruitful friendship

J Williams

Violin Concerto No 2. The Long Goodbye – Theme. Raiders of the Lost Ark – Marion's Theme. Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back – Han Solo and the Princess

Anne-Sophie Mutter *vn*

Boston Symphony Orchestra / John Williams

DG (486 1698 • 51'); also available on ● 486 1705, containing Concerto only

J Williams

'A Gathering of Friends'

Cello Concerto^a. Highwood's Ghost^b. Lincoln – With Malice Toward None^a. Munich – A Prayer for Peace^c. Schindler's List – Three Pieces^a

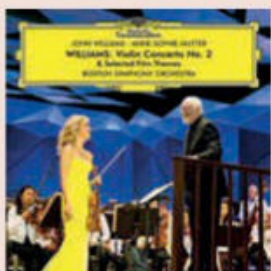
^a**Yo-Yo Ma** *vc* ^b**Jessica Zhou** *hp*

^c**Pablo Sáinz-Villegas** *gtr* **New York**

Philharmonic Orchestra / John Williams

Sony Classical (19439 98366-2;

● 19439 98366-1 • 68')



'The Guv'nor' of movie music is quick to acknowledge those who have inspired him – composers and performers alike – and these two new releases are as much a tribute to the creative impulses of his two closest musical soulmates as they are to the music they unlock in him.

John Williams's Violin Concerto No 2 is essentially a portrait of Anne-Sophie Mutter and all the wild and wonderful things she can do with an instrument with whom she is at one. From the very first tentative solo of the piece – feeling its way into our consciousness, or so it seems – an air of improvisation prevails. We know how much Williams loves jazz and it's that spirit that permeates both the concertos featured on Mutter's and Ma's albums. There are adventures afoot – and not just in that galaxy far, far away but right here and now in the inventions (or so it seems) of the moment. Better yet, composer and performer feel, in the broadest sense, in complete alignment.

Dramatic gestures apart, don't expect Williams, the master of movie magic and purveyor of luscious themes, simply to tender more of the same in these concertos. What he offers here is way more complex, way thornier. Both pieces are alive with 'technique' stretched to its limits. Mutter's violin concerto is virtuoso and then some, and as such there are stretches of music that you might not recognise as being by Williams at all. In that regard this is music that might not be as easy to love but is infectious by virtue of its creative energy, the sparks of interaction generated between player and composer and the gamesmanship it engenders.

In the slow movement of the violin concerto, 'Rounds', the legendary Williams lyricist finds freer rein – searching and very beautiful – and there is renewal in the healing 'Epilogue', where somewhere at the back of one's mind Mutter and *Schindler's List* resonate. Paradoxically that particular theme – one of Williams's loveliest and most enduring – is not included here but rather finds a deeper resonance in the cello of Yo-Yo Ma, for whom Williams created a concert piece of three fragments from that Oscar-winning score. More on that anon.

For Mutter and the Boston Symphony Orchestra Williams offers concert pieces from one of the least familiar of his scores, *The Long Goodbye* – which lives up to its title in the very best sense – alongside Indiana Jones taking time out from thwarting raiders of the lost Ark with a bit of love interest and finally a side-trip to that far-off galaxy where Han Solo and Princess Leia canoodle to the lushest note-spinning Williams can muster.

'A Gathering of Friends' celebrates three decades of friendship between Williams and Ma, and features a radical revision of the Cello Concerto first conceived after their initial meeting through the Boston Pops Orchestra. For this new recording the New York Philharmonic do the honours. First impressions: it seems to me very Waltonian (if with an American accent), and I know for sure that Williams would be flattered by the observation. The leading melody of the first movement is very sensuous and exotic – a hothouse specimen such as one finds in Walton's own Cello Concerto (and his Violin and Viola Concertos) –

and the dislocated jazziness of the Scherzo is possessed of that slightly rebellious quality found in all free spirits. Needless to say it becomes an indomitable force in the cadenza, where Ma really digs in. But then again, the illicit sighs of the 'Blues' movement run deep and the closing 'Song' seems to come full circle in the spirit of improvisation with Ma suggesting that he not Williams might be making it up as he goes along. Only the great ones can do that.

And so back to the movies with the unforgettable Schindler. We know and love the theme but its songfulness is if anything intensified with the dusky resonances of the cello. The second fragment, 'Kraków Ghetto', is a mournful Jewish dance morphing into something gruff and defiant, and 'Remembrances' – soulful and radiant – makes something hopeful of painful memories with just a glimmer of the beloved Schindler theme at the close.

The oration from *Lincoln* – 'With Malice Toward None' in an arrangement for cello and strings – is one of those aspirational tunes (seemingly effortless for Williams) that Americans live to embrace, and lower-key but no less resonant or meaningful in reach is the arrangement for cello and guitar (Pablo Sáinz-Villegas) of the 'Prayer for Peace' from *Munich*.

Most intriguing of all, though, is *Highwood's Ghost* (2018), which Williams wrote in memory of Leonard Bernstein in his centennial year and which invokes his indomitable spirit and that of the Tanglewood Music Festival with reference to yet another indomitable spirit – a ghost said to inhabit Highwood Manor House on the grounds of the festival, which Bernstein claimed personally to have encountered. This 'confrontation' is spookily realised through the dulcet tones of Lenny as reincarnated in the voice of Ma's cello and a startling apparition of ear-popping virtuosity from solo harp (Jessica Zhou). More startling to my ears, though, is the fleeting allusion to Britten's *Peter Grimes*, of which Bernstein conducted the American premiere there in 1946.

Another great example of how Williams's points of reference reach far and wide and wider still. **G**

► See our feature on John Williams's concert music on page 22

Serenade on Contredanses from Old Graz comprises six finely crafted and charming movements for strings, adapted by the composer from an original version for full orchestra. The work's high-spirited and joyous finale, 'Dudelsack' ('Bagpipe'), makes one want to play the work all over again. Completed in 1993, the *Three Pieces* for strings are miniatures that draw on Celtic, Hungarian and American themes for their inspiration.

Largely composed in 1947 but not finalised until 2000, the Concerto for piano, strings and percussion finds the composer at his most Bartókian, with elements of Arabic music and Stravinsky featuring in the mix. The first movement is the most ambitious of the three but also sounds somewhat episodic, while the second draws heavily on Bartók's 'night music' style. The 2003 recording by Aima Maria Labra-Makk is very good but Oliver Triendl's faster pace in the finale brings noticeably more energy and excitement.

In all the performances, the playing of the orchestra under Evan-Alexis Christ is enormously accomplished and persuasive, and the recording is of demonstration quality. A most impressive release.

Christian Hoskins

Piano Concerto – comparative version:

Labbra-Makk, Savaria SO, Pál Hungaroton HCD32278

Vaughan Williams

Symphonies – No 7, 'Sinfonia antartica'; No 9.

The Lark Ascending^b. Norfolk Rhapsody No 1^c

^aSophie Bevan sop ^bLyn Fletcher vn

Hallé ^aChoir and Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder

Hallé (CDHLD7558 @ • 107')

^aRecorded live at The Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, January 24, 2019. ^{bc}From CDHLL7512 (12/06)



Here's the concluding instalment in Mark Elder's Vaughan Williams symphony

cycle on the Hallé's own label, its release – and that of a five-CD set containing all nine symphonies (CDHLD7557) – timed to mark the 150th anniversary of the composer's birth.

Set down in conjunction with a warmly received live performance from January 2019 at Manchester's Bridgewater Hall, this new *Sinfonia antartica* impresses by dint of its painstaking preparation, excitingly transparent textures (an asset it shares with Manze's RLPO version) and powerfully evocative atmosphere (though soprano Sophie Bevan and the women's chorus are placed offstage, which won't please everyone). Wisely leaving it to the

listener to reflect upon the literary quotations printed in the score's preface (as suggested by the composer), Elder presides over an unhurried, conspicuously eloquent display, if without that last clinching ounce of structural grip that makes rival accounts from Barbirolli, Boult (1953, even with those spoken interpolations from John Gielgud), Haitink, Handley and Andrew Davis (2017) so compelling. The last two especially benefit from a stunningly impactful organ contribution in the central 'Landscape', while, to my ears at least, no one quite matches Handley (Warner, 1/95) for the touchingly compassionate tenderness he brings to the succeeding Intermezzo. Also, in the second movement there's surely more twinkling humour in the depiction of the penguins' gawky antics than Elder conveys (RVW's *scherzando* markings go for very little).

Still, there's lots to admire elsewhere, and the companion performance of the Ninth (set down as recently as last November in Hallé St Peter's, Ancoats) is even more rewarding. Drawing some notably dedicated and uncommonly alert playing, Elder steers a shrewdly paced, enviably far-sighted course, though just occasionally there's some marginal loss in momentum. At the heart of the second movement, for instance, I prefer the *pochetissimo animato* at three bars after fig 8 or 3'19" to move on fractionally more than it does here (Handley for one judges this to perfection); that said, a little later on from one after fig 19 or 6'11", what ravishing tone from the Hallé's principal cello, Nicholas Trygstad. The imposing finale builds inexorably to its illimitably questing culmination (the daringly spacious Manze rather loses the thread in this same movement), and there are adroit contributions from the trio of saxophones and flugelhorn. In sum, an involving and memorably unforced Ninth that should, I think, be sought out by all admirers of the composer.

Truth to tell, neither the *Norfolk Rhapsody* No 1 nor *The Lark Ascending* (with Hallé leader Lyn Fletcher a technically immaculate soloist) appeal to me much more than they did back in December 2006, when they appeared on an underwhelming anthology entitled 'English Landscapes' (both performances are lacking something in fresh-faced spontaneity and sheer wonder). However, for the two main offerings alone this new issue certainly earns a positive welcome.

Andrew Achenbach

Symphonies Nos 7 & 9 – selected comparison:

RLPO, Manze

Onyx ONYX4190 (7/19)

Debussy's Jeux

Conductor **Domingo Hindoyan** tells Mark Pullinger about plumbing the depths of this late work

It's a slippery fish!' exclaims Domingo Hindoyan. 'It's always escaping your grasp and swimming away from you.' The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's new Chief Conductor is describing Debussy's ballet *Jeux*, which features on his first recording with the orchestra. The Venezuelan clearly relishes a challenge – the performances in January were the first time he'd conducted the piece. It certainly has an elusive quality.

Debussy described *Jeux* as a *poème dansé*. Composed for Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky, it premiered at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on May 15, 1913, the score conducted by Pierre Monteux. Note the date: just a fortnight later, in the same theatre and under the same creative team, Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* opened, a *succès de scandale* that rather left *Jeux* in the shade. Doesn't this shadowy ballet – a *ménage à trois* around a game of tennis – deserve better?

'*Jeux* is a piece that I have admired for a very long time but I was very much afraid of it,' Hindoyan explains as we settle down with our respective scores over Zoom. 'It has at first a kind of superficiality – it's difficult to appreciate the depths of the music, but as soon as you get there it's worth it.'

How had Debussy's writing changed by the time he reached *Jeux*, his last major orchestral work, composed nearly 20 years after *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*? 'I came across something by Boulez who said that *Jeux* was *Faune* in sports clothes! The climaxes are built in a more sophisticated chromaticism. He dares to do new things, to use different colours. The orchestration is more diluted – he uses his palette of colours in a way that means the ear has to "search" more. And his use of form, which began with *Faune*, goes even further, so it becomes a natural development – organic.'

For a work that doesn't last 20 minutes, there's an awful lot going on its 118 pages. The first thing we note is all the tempo changes: more than 50 in the entire ballet. Changes in time signature, Hindoyan notes, are not a problem: 'It's not like *The Rite*, where it can change every two bars. The difficulties come with changes of character and changes of colour, rather than changes in tempo and time signature. What is difficult is when Debussy changes the time signature, together with a change of colour, together with a very short transition and then a change in orchestration.'



Relishing a challenge: Hindoyan is relatively new to *Jeux*, but has admired the work for a very long time

Debussy's orchestration is deft. 'It's a chamber music piece written for a big orchestra. At one of the key moments [fig 74], he uses the full force of the orchestra and there is a very strange marking where he writes *violent* – but this is a moment where we're actually talking about sensuality!'

We look at the very opening, noting the way Debussy mixes horns and harps to sound 'almost like harmonics'. Strings float in and then there is a series of woodwind chords that are 'challenging in terms of intonation and dynamics and register', says Hindoyan. 'Debussy writes *doux et rêveur* – how do we do that? You need to find a softness in the sound.'

There follow tiny one- and two-bar motifs that seem to get passed back and forth, almost like a tennis rally. 'Twenty years earlier he would have written this phrase [fig 1, marked *Scherzando*] just for the violas. Here it is started by the violas, but cellos and bassoons take it over, then the percussion finish it off. The orchestra has to understand that it's one phrase.'

Two instructions Debussy issues several times in the score are *retenu* and *cédez*. Do these provide the conductor with flexibility? 'It took me nights of reflection to understand what he wants,' Hindoyan confesses. 'For instance, *retenu* is a rallentando and is weaker than *cédez*. *Cédez* means a little bit

of relaxing of the tempo. But the really tricky one is *sans rigueur*, which means “not rigorous” – but behind that, Debussy has rhythmical elements that somehow require precision! So how do you play that?’ He points out four bars before fig 13. ‘This is the challenge: the ear tells your eyes that there is no rhythm, but behind it there is a structure. I don’t want to use the word rigorous, because he says *sans rigueur*, but there is rhythmical discipline; the sensuality of the crescendos and decrescendos must give the quality of *sans rigueur*.’

We jump to fig 33, *Assez animé*, where there is a big mood change marked *ironique et léger*. ‘This is one of my favourite moments, starting at fig 31, where you have *plus alanguie* (a little bit slower). Then you have this *retenu* all the time – and at figure 32, *passionnément*, more *forte*. Then nobody expects what happens at figure 33 ... it just cuts out. It’s like they suddenly say, “Forget this sensuality, let’s go back to looking for the tennis ball!” That’s why he writes *ironique* – because they’re trying to recapture this shyness from the beginning of the ballet ... but it’s not really true because what does Debussy write again later? *Passionnément*!’

In general, Debussy doesn't use percussion for rhythmical elements – he uses it almost exclusively for melodic purposes'

One of the other interesting moments occurs between figs 46 and 49, where we seem to be moving towards a big climax, a joyous theme, but the orchestra again cuts out, leaving the flute and violins suspended in mid-air. Hindoyan explains that although Debussy divides his first violins at this point, the Liverpool players’ parts had previously been marked up so that the firsts play the entire phrase. ‘Debussy’s whole idea was to divide the violins – it’s more difficult, more challenging, but it makes a special effect. I restored it to Debussy’s original version here, which made it a challenging spot.’

What was the most difficult section to master? ‘From figure 49 – how to shape it correctly. Two bars before figure 50, there is no indication of anything – just one *très doux*. There is so much going on that I miss there being a few more indications from him. For instance, three bars before 50, with the clarinets – does he want a little *accelerando*?’

In terms of orchestration, we home in on Debussy’s use of percussion, particularly the tambourine. ‘Look at figure 6 – the tambourine totally belongs to the melodic line and Debussy plays with that. In general, he doesn’t use percussion for rhythmical elements, he uses it almost exclusively for melodic purposes. For instance, two bars before figure 24 it’s there just to help the line ... the tambourine plays the same crescendo as the tremolo in the strings. All the time, it’s part of the melody. It’s totally different from Ravel in *Boléro*, where the percussion is the engine of the piece; here it’s colour and melody.’

That tambourine features at the very end of the ballet – when the tennis ball is lobbed back from the bushes and our players realise they are not alone. Spooked, they scarper and the music just ... stops. ‘This sudden ending is very ungrateful for the orchestra and the conductor,’ Hindoyan suggests. ‘After all this work – nobody realises that the piece has finished.’ It almost feels like a shrug, but it has a coy humour that suggests that after these shenanigans in the woods nothing can quite return to normal. **G**

Hindoyan’s *Jeux* recording on Onyx will be reviewed in a future issue

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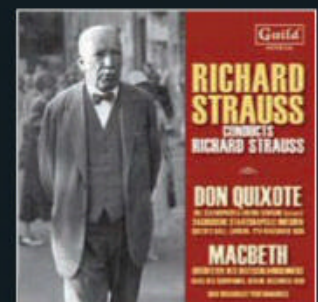
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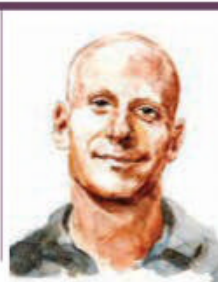
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Andrew Farach-Colton on the latest album from Anne Akiko Meyers:

'Meyers slips and slides through much of the Villa-Lobos, maintaining a sure rhythmic grip of the melodic line' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 63**

Beethoven

Complete Cello Sonatas

Alisa Weilerstein *vc* **Inon Barnatan** *vc*

Pentatone (PTC5186 884 ② • 111')



'One of my favourite things about performing

Beethoven's complete cycle of sonatas for cello and piano is that in five relatively short pieces I get to hear Beethoven through almost the entire span of his musical life', writes pianist Inon Barnatan in the booklet notes to this new cycle with cellist Alisa Weilerstein. Weilerstein, too, talks of a progression: of Beethoven 'smashing conventions' as these five experimental works progress. In recording the whole set over a brief period of time in San Diego in October 2020, it's clear that they've conceived their approach as a whole.

So it might seem curious to suggest that you begin at the end, with the finale of the D major Sonata, Op 102 No 2. This is Beethoven on the cusp of his late style, simultaneously spare and rich, playful and intensely dramatic, and Weilerstein and Barnatan bring out its full strangeness, with Weilerstein's warm but focused tone crisply defining the music's contrapuntal framework even while Barnatan mixes dark, weird harmonies deep in his left hand. Quiet moments quiver with latent energy; rhythms kick and spring, and the final gesture feels less like the cycle slamming shut than a door being kicked open (really quite forcibly) on to a new world of possibility.

If you like the sound of that, odds are you'll enjoy the rest of this forceful, impulsive and highly characterful cycle. The exploratory boldness of that final movement casts its shadow, retroactively, over the whole cycle. So there's no lingering trace of the rococo in the two Op 5 Sonatas: that bigness, that rawness and that spirit of untamed Romantic

adventure is there from the outset. At any given moment in these five sonatas, Barnatan's crescendos can sweep up and in, thundering like a spring gale. Time and again Weilerstein digs her heels in against the piano's squalls, with fierce, crunchy spread chords and the bite of horsehair against string. Beethoven's *sforzandos* certainly get their due.

That can be thrilling, and it's never less than bracing. The massive, sombre introduction to the G minor Sonata, Op 5 No 2, finds the two creating grand, dramatic silences; the faster passages of the fantasia-like C major Sonata, Op 102 No 1, become jagged under the sheer force of the pair's playing. Which is not to say that there aren't moments of poetry: there's a plaintive, wide-grained sweetness to Weilerstein's tone that gives a real tenderness to (say) the long, pregnant slow movement of Op 102 No 2 or the brief *Adagio* of Op 69. This sonata, in particular, benefits from the bigness of the pair's vision and the relentlessness of their shared energy: the range of expression on display here is genuinely symphonic.

Could it be more refined, say, or more playful? Yes, in truth, it could; there isn't a bar of these performances where you aren't aware of a potentially lethal voltage humming away just beneath the surface. Listening to this entire cycle at one sitting will test your patience for dynamic extremes and bristling textures. But it's certainly assured, and if you're after a recording that'll blow open the windows of this music and scour away your preconceptions – well, look no further than Weilerstein and Barnatan.

Richard Bratby

Brahms • Rachmaninov • Ravel

'Musical Remembrances'

Brahms Piano Trio No 1, Op 8

Rachmaninov Trio élégiaque No 1

Ravel Piano Trio

Neave Trio

Chandos (CHAN20167 • 77')



Some themes seem more alluring on paper than in reality, and the linking of

three quite disparate sound worlds and styles under the banner of remembrance doesn't necessarily make for the most natural of listening experiences. That said, if the performances are persuasive enough, such quibbles disappear.

The Neave Trio begin with Rachmaninov's youthful *Trio élégiaque* No 1, and its opening sounds a little reined in: pianist Eri Nakamura could afford to be more forthright against the accompanying strings, who are nicely sweet-toned. But 'nice' doesn't really cut it in a work of such swirling emotionalism, and while the Neave have a good sense of the ebb and flow of the Trio, they don't reach the extremes of, for instance, Kremer, Dirvanauskaitė and Trifonov, who blend real urgency with imaginative flair. As Rachmaninov stills the momentum in the closing bars, the strings *con sordino*, the Neave are less shattering (and shattered) than in the Kremer account.

They present Brahms's First Piano Trio in its revised version of 1889, but here the competition is even hotter than in the Rachmaninov. There's an unhurried quality to the first movement, cellist Mikhail Veselov eager to make the most of the beauty of his unfolding melody, with violinist Anna Williams joining in a gentle duet. I much like their tempo for the Scherzo, which sounds duly effortless, but the pay-off is a lack of fury as the tone hots up (Vogt and the Tetzlaff siblings are terrifying here), while in the B major Trio they don't find the same degree of serenity as Pires, Dumay and Wang. But the real issue in this reading is the Neave's *Adagio*, which is dangerously slow – as slow as Pires et al but with none of their sense of line; Vogt and friends go for a more easeful, natural-sounding tempo here. The Neave's finale is an easier listen, tempo-



Andrew Smith (right) and Joshua Pierce explore Mozart's output for violin and piano in Fairfield, Connecticut – see review overleaf

wise, but others find a greater degree of edginess and dare to do more with Brahms's hushed dynamics.

It's a similar story in the Ravel: while the dreamlike, veiled qualities of the opening movement are relatively effective, the more vehement writing tends to be a tad polite and there isn't that sense of journeying from movement into stillness that groups such as the Capuçon brothers and Frank Braley conjure so potently. The second-movement 'Pantoum' is unquestionably pristine in finish but somewhat underwhelming emotionally, the climax at 1'36" a pale affair compared to the Capuçon/Braley reading. As in the Brahms, they're tempted to take the slow movement, the famous Passacaille, too spaciouly. And again, it's less to do with tempo than line. Whereas Braley imparts a sense of majesty and inwardness as he reveals the passacaglia theme, Nakamura's approach is relatively plain and you're much more aware of the bar lines. Matters improve in the *Animé* finale, with some fine filigree playing on display, but the dramatic, trumpet-infused idea is relatively

undercharacterised, and mere moments with Capuçon/Braley sweep you into a much more vivid world.

The Neave are, however, beautifully captured by Chandos's recording team, and Stephen Johnson contributes typically classy notes. **Harriet Smith**

Brahms – selected comparisons:

Dumay, Wang, Pires DG 447 055-2GH (5/96)

T & C Tetzlaff, Vogt Ondine ODE1271-2D (8/15)

Rachmaninov – selected comparison:

Kremer, Dirvanauskaitė, Trifonov DG 479 6979GH (5/17)

Ravel – selected comparison:

R & G Capuçon, Braley Erato 545492-2 (5/02)

Coleridge-Taylor

Nonet, 'Gradus ad Parnassum', Op 2.

Piano Quintet, Op 1. Piano Trio

Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective

Chandos (CHAN20242 • 64')



These three chamber works, which lay undisturbed and unperformed for

the whole of the last century, were selected to be performed by the Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective to mark their appointment in 2020 as Wigmore Hall's Associate Ensemble. Indeed, while the Nonet and Piano Quartet have been disinterred for performance over the past couple of decades, the brief Piano Trio was possibly at that London concert receiving its first performance since a student run-through at the Royal College of Music almost 130 years ago. The three works make an impressive sequence, demonstrating Coleridge-Taylor's precocity: each dates from around 1893, when he was an 18-year-old student at the RCM and five years before he composed *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*, the cantata that made his name on both sides of the Atlantic.

The two larger works here, the Nonet and the Quintet, burst with confidence and freshness. Coleridge-Taylor may have imbibed the examples of Brahms and Schumann from his teacher, Stanford, but there is a notable individuality to his themes, harmonies and developmental gambits. It's easy to play spot-the-

influence – the usual suspects from the European Romantic repertory and especially Dvořák, Coleridge-Taylor's idol, almost to the point of direct quotation in places – but the emerging voice is singular and personal, for all that the external stimuli are yet to be fully digested. The Piano Trio is far more terse, lasting all of nine minutes and devoid of a slow movement.

The Kaleidoscope players coalesce around the husband-and-wife duo of Elena Urioste and Tom Poster, and with musicians of the calibre of cornist Ben Goldscheider and cellist Laura van der Heijden, the performances match the assurance and spirit of the music. Only the Quintet has been recorded before – by the Nash Ensemble and by the Tippett Quartet with pianist Lynn Arnold – but the Nonet, whose autograph manuscript can be followed online, is a valuable addition to the catalogue. The listener is reminded to some extent of Schubert, the sound world sitting between that of the *Trout* Quintet on the one hand and the Octet on the other; the oboe is the only instrument unique to the Nonet. There's a marked Mendelssohnian lightness to the Scherzo, too. Nevertheless, the Nonet impresses in its own right for its youthful zeal, its genuine craftsmanship and its notable ambition and imagination.

David Threasher

Piano Quintet – comparative versions:

Nash Ens Hyperion CDA67590 (11/07)

Tippett Qt, Arnold Dutton CDLX7386

Gregson

String Quartets^a – No 1; No 2. *Benedictus*^b.

Le jardin à Giverny^c. *Triptych*^d

^c**Alison Teale** *cor ang* ^b**Rob Buckland** *alto sax*

^{ab}**Navarra Quartet** (^dBenjamin Marquise Gilmore, Bartosz Woroch *vns* Sascha Bota *va* Brian O'Kane *vc*) Naxos (8 574223 • 67')



He may remain best known through his works for brass band but Edward Gregson

(b1945) has amassed a substantial and diverse output that has been covered extensively by Chandos and more recently Naxos, whose latest release focuses on the composer's chamber music.

Bookending this selection are his string quartets, a medium that Gregson has described as 'the composer's ultimate challenge'. The First Quartet (2014) faces such a challenge head on, its first movement abounding in jagged and dislocated gestures, with a wistful

secondary theme whose belated return provides an affecting close. With aspects of march and burlesque before its concluding lullaby, the 'Fantasia on a Chorale' is the highlight, but the bracing final rondo rather contrives its ultimate affirmation; something that Gregson avoids in his Second Quartet (2017). At the centre of this single movement is an apex of sustained passion, framed by martial and scherzo episodes whose acerbic harmonies and refractory textures are thrown into relief by the initial Siciliana, whose transformation brings a close of ethereal eloquence.

These are convincing renditions by the Navarra Quartet, whose violinist Benjamin Marquise Gilmore is no less equal to *Triptych* (2011) – its initial dialogue eliding the Dionysian and Apollonian to heady effect, followed by a Liebeslied of subdued pathos then a Moto perpetuo of bristling virtuosity. As to the arrangements of earlier pieces, the songful *Le jardin à Giverny* (2016) harks back to Gregson's formative years while *Benedictus* (2021) easily transcends its vocal origin. Alison Teale and Rob Buckland do them proud, and anyone curious as to Gregson's exploratory side should certainly investigate this excellently recorded and annotated release. **Richard Whitehouse**

T Lupo

Twenty Fantasias

Fretwork

Signum (SIGCD716 • 64')



An intriguing detail in the booklet note tells us that Thomas Lupo (1571-1627) was paid

40 marks in 1621 to compose for an ensemble comprising 13 string players. That makes him, according to violist and note-writer Richard Boothby, composer for 'the world's first orchestra'. While none of this so-called orchestral music has survived, what we do have is splendid: viol consort music in a variety of parts and moods.

The playing, as you would expect from Fretwork, is extremely fine. A generosity of sound colours many of the tracks. Take Fantasia No 29 in five parts, VdGS25: the plucky attack of the fugal theme is windblown to the textural surface, buoyed by an aerated push of resonance. At moments it sounds as if there could be an accordion or chamber organ hidden in the thicket of viols, such is the glowing sonic core. This sonority recurs in Fantasia No 15 in three parts, VdGS26.

The sound is enveloping: not only do the contrapuntal lines seem to care for one another, caressing and plying their neighbours with balm, but they seem to care for us, their listeners. The effect, even when the Fantasia quickens into liveliness, is entirely calming.

But where this album really gets going is the final five fantasias. Fantasia No 8 in three parts, VdGS10, flickers with energy. The viols nudge at each other in varying degrees of contention and the counterpoint is not so much resolved as stretched to its elastic limits in the fantasia's final seconds. My favourite movement, however, is Fantasia No 10 in six parts, VdGS10, in which a chugging stirs at the centre of the texture – it's merely an itch at first but soon gathers voices and grows in scratchy rowdiness, only then to give way to the treble viols in angelic concord. These fantasias by Lupo are a fine discovery indeed; brought to such life as they are here by Fretwork, it's a puzzle how they are not better known. **Mark Seow**

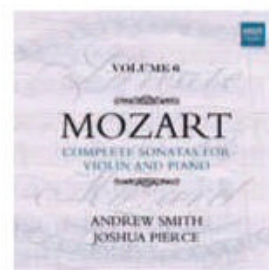
Mozart

'Complete Sonatas for Violin and Piano'

Andrew Smith *vn* **Joshua Pierce** *pf*

MSR Classics (MS1800 © • 6h 55')

Broadcast performances, recorded live at The Stone Family Assembly Hall, WSHU Public Radio Broadcast Center, Fairfield, CT, January-June 2019



Piano-accompanied performances of all of Mozart's violin sonatas are surprisingly few

and far between. Most duos – perhaps wisely – restrict themselves to the works of the composer's adulthood, from K296 onwards. The reason is simple: the earliest works, especially when listened to one after the other, offer little interest beyond the fact of their being the work of a child aged between six and eight. 'Complete', though, needs further qualification, still more the booklet note's claim of 'presenting every single piece Mozart wrote for violin and piano'. Two sets of variations (K359 and 360) are absent, as are the hybrid sonatas K10-15 (published in London in 1765 as Op III), designated for flute or violin and keyboard with optional cello. So we have the works of the infant Mozart: K6-9, published in Paris in 1763 as Opp I and II, plus the barely more advanced K26-31 (Op IV, The Hague and Amsterdam, 1766). Then there are the mature works, written during Mozart's early and mid-twenties, and the four late sonatas, composed in Vienna during the

1780s. Additionally there are a handful of fragments, some of them canonical (K402-404), a couple in completions undertaken after Mozart's death by Maximilian Stadler but others left tantalisingly unrealised.

These performances were given as a series of six concerts for WSHU Public Radio, based on the campus of Sacred Heart University in Connecticut. The Broadcast Center appears to be a modern, low-ceilinged building, which, along with fairly close miking, limits the dynamic and colouristic spectrum of the violin, although as the works become more ambitious and thickly voiced, the mics seem to move out a touch. Nevertheless, when compared with similar projects such as Alina Ibragimova's survey, the slightly constricted sound picture to some extent obscures the range of attacks and addresses Andrew Smith has in his technical arsenal.

The mature sonatas, too, boast a greater range of expressive devices in these readings than the earlier ones (and the sketches), presumably because they have been more central to Smith's career as a violinist. These players seem happiest when there is lots to do: in passages such as the busy development of K306's opening *Allegro con spirito* or the main *Allegro* of K454. Elsewhere, in a balance that

somewhat favours the violin over the piano, Smith's repeated accompanimental passagework can occasionally become a touch over-insistent.

In general, these are valiant rather than revelatory performances. For those who, say, wished to make a first acquaintance with these works, the comprehensiveness, compact dimensions and price-point of this six-disc collection may well appeal, although it presents no real challenge to Ibragimova's set, beautifully performed and thoughtfully programmed over five two-disc sets but yet to be made available in a single box. **David Threasher**

Complete Violin Sonatas – selected comparison:

Ibragimova, Tiberghien Hyperion CDA68091/92/143/164/175 (oas – 5/16, 10/16, 4/17, A/17, 4/18)

Rachmaninov • L Rose • Smetana

Rachmaninov Trio élégiaque No 1 **L Rose**

Piano Trio, Op 26 **Smetana** Piano Trio, Op 15

Aquinas Piano Trio

Stone Records (5060192 781175 • 76")



With a discography including two volumes of Haydn (Naxos), the piano trios of Saint-

Saëns (Guild, 11/14) and newer works by Rob Keeley (Naxos) and Thomas Hyde (Guild), the Aquinas Piano Trio are clearly at home in a wide repertoire, as is reflected in the works heard on this new release.

Interest centres on the Piano Trio (2019) by Lawrence Rose who, now in his late seventies, turned exclusively to composition after a career in law and relocating to Chicago. The work is cast in seven movements, with anticipatory or recollective links drawing these into a cohesive yet intentionally non-seamless whole. Most impressive are the second-movement passacaglia with its combative dialogue for strings and piano, then the final *Largo*, whose elegiac intensity pointedly underlines those mass shootings and war crimes such as provided the creative spur.

The Aquinas make a persuasive case for this work and sound hardly less assured in the other pieces. The discursive initial movement of the Smetana (1854) is trenchant and forthright but with enough expressive poise to avoid hectoring, while the interplay of dance rhythms in the Scherzo or emotional volatility reaching uneasy catharsis in the finale are tangibly conveyed. Nor does the overall sombreness of Rachmaninov's G minor (1892) lack expressive variety, its single movement



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Other highlights include Astor Piazzolla's timeless Oblivion and Le Grand Tango, and Egberto Gismonti's Água e Vinho.

ORC100198

accruing real fervency before withdrawing into Tchaikovskian fatalism.

Those who have the Dvořák Trio's impetuous Smetana (with Dvořák's *Dumky*) or the Gould Trio's eloquent Rachmaninov (with the Tchaikovsky) can rest content, but those for whom this coupling appeals and who are drawn to the Rose will find this a worthwhile collection. The sound is unexceptionally fine, and Rose's booklet is thought-provoking.

Richard Whitehouse

Rachmaninov – selected comparison:

Gould Trio *Champs Hill CHRC012 (2/11)*

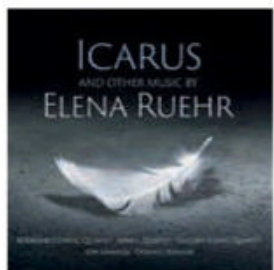
Smetana – selected comparison:

Dvořák Trio *Supraphon SU4144-2 (3/14)*

Ruehr

Icarus^a. String Quartets – No 7, 'A Thousand Cranes'^b; No 8, 'Insect Dances'^c. *The Worlds Revolve*^d

^aJon Manasse *cl*/^dDonald Berman *pf*/^cArneis Quartet; ^dBorromeo Quartet; ^bDelgani Quartet Avie (AV2502 • 59')



I was mightily impressed with Elena Ruehr's first six quartets (5/18),

choosing that Avie set as my Critics' Choice for 2018, and am pleased to report that the Seventh, *A Thousand Cranes* (2019), carries on from where its predecessors left off. As before, Ruehr (*b*1963) adopts a different approach and structure for each work, with the Seventh cast in one large span (as was No 2) but consisting of mini-movements played without pause. The inspiration lies in the reminiscences of children displaced by war, the work's emotional trajectory running from innocence (sounding not unlike Tippett), through loss, to a sadder, wiser state at the close. The Eighth (2020) could scarcely be of greater contrast, reflected in its tripartite title: *Insect Dances: Suite for String Quartet No 8*. The suite, 'for listeners of all ages', describes the antics of six hexapodae at a party, each with their own dance: a swinging spider, a flitting dragonfly, an uninvited, stomping wasp, a boogieing bumblebee and a waltzing ladybug, concluding with a grasshopper polka.

Icarus (2018) is a tone poem inspired by the famous Greek legend of the hero's ill-fated flight too close to the sun. A multilayered work expressively, it focuses primarily on the euphoria of building the wings and initial flight, but with an elegiac undertow pointing to the tragic denouement. *The Worlds Revolve* for piano and strings (2016) takes its cue from the

final lines of Eliot's fourth Prelude:

'The worlds revolve like ancient women / Gathering fuel in vacant lots.' Each of the four movements takes a phrase from this quotation to spin beguiling and varied musical fantasies.

One could not ask for a more committed roster of performers. *The Worlds Revolve* and *Icarus* were commissioned for the Borromeo Quartet to perform with Donald Berman and John Manasse respectively, whose exemplary performances are captured here in fine sound. *Insect Dances* was written for the Arneis Quartet, whose vivacious rendition concludes the disc. They were co-commissioners, with the Quartet Nouveau and Delgani Quartet, of the Seventh; the Delgani are the captivating executants here. Once again, Mark Wilsher has remastered the recordings, made on four occasions in 2019 and 2021, with consummate skill. Recommended. **Guy Rickards**

Weinberg

'String Quartets, Vol 2'

String Quartets – No 1, Op 2/141;

No 7, Op 59; No 11, Op 89

Arcadia Quartet

Chandos (CHAN20174 • 70')



The first volume in the Arcadia Quartet's cycle of Weinberg's string quartets (3/21)

was a solid basis from which to continue, and this follow-up more than fulfils those earlier expectations.

It starts with the First Quartet (1937) in a 1985 revision that preserves its emotional fervour and streamlines its technical dexterity. The Arcadia are unafraid to point up influences at work – the Szymanowskian harmonic richness of its initial *Allegro*, the Bergian expressive intensity of its central *Andante* and the Bartókian rhythmic drive of its final *Allegro* – while emphasising how these are rendered from a vantage that, whatever its recklessness, is inherently personal.

The Seventh Quartet (1957) remains one of Weinberg's best. Yet it unfolds obliquely from a long-breathed if restive *Adagio*, via a quizzical and often ironic intermezzo, to a finale whose 23 variations elide between cumulative energy and formal inevitability with unfailing purpose. Superb in those first two movements, the Arcadia slightly underplay the finale's culmination – but the gravitas of the introduction and coda that frame the whole is impressively sustained.

The Eleventh Quartet (1965-66)

finds Weinberg venturing towards more speculative terrain. Its opening *Allegro* abounds in a furtive anxiety that is barely allayed by an elusive scherzo or becalmed slow movement, while the final *Allegro* brings a degree of solidity with allusions to earlier ideas across its inward course. Easy to underestimate in the context of this cycle, it receives its most perceptive recording thus far – a harbinger of Weinberg's quartet thinking.

The Silesian Quartet still steer the most cohesive course through the First Quartet, while the Quatuor Danel imbue the finale of the Seventh with irresistible momentum. Yet with sound and (David Fanning's) booklet notes comparable to that previous volume, no one acquiring Weinberg's quartets in this current cycle will be disappointed with what is encountered here. **Richard Whitehouse**

String Quartet No 1 – selected comparisons:

Danel Qt *CPO CPO777 566-2 (2/12)*

Silesian Qt *CD Accord ACD284*

String Quartets Nos 7 & 11 – selected comparison:

Danel Qt *CPO CPO777 392-2 (2/09)*

String Quartet No 7 – selected comparison:

Silesian Qt *CD Accord ACD239*

String Quartet No 11 – selected comparison:

Silesian Qt *CD Accord ACD250*

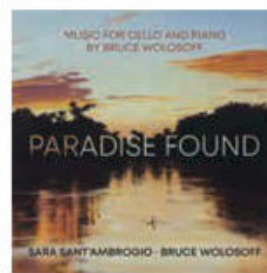
Wolosoff

'Paradise Found'

Cello Sonatas – No 1, 'Paradise Found'; No 2, 'Requiem for the Planet'. Circe. The Woods

Sara Sant'Ambrogio *vc* **Bruce Wolosoff** *pf*

Avie (AV2492 • 56')



Lifelong New Yorker Bruce Wolosoff (*b*1955) is a formidable pianist and a composer

who delights in blurring genre boundaries. I've enjoyed his down-and-dirty *Four Blues* for piano (on a self-published disc), and my colleague Donald Rosenberg found Wolosoff's *Songs without Words* for string quartet 'beautifully crafted' (Naxos, 2/11^{US}). The two cello sonatas on this new recording are also songs without words, in a way.

One only has to listen to the first few minutes of *Paradise Found* and the cello's many repeated notes to get the impression that the cello part is a vocal line with the lyrics removed. I use the word 'lyrics' purposely, for Wolosoff's musical language here is steeped in popular song, with slow-changing harmonies and a piano part that's largely a swirl of arpeggiation. I hear a little bit of a Dessner-esque chord progression at

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'Miniature gems'

Vaughan Williams crafted art songs with all the intimacy and finesse of a Fabergé egg. Three singers and an accompanist share their thoughts with Adrian Horwood about what makes these works so special

For many, Ralph Vaughan Williams occupies prime position in the pantheon of English art song composers; there can be scarcely a singer of our time who does not have "Silent Noon" or "The Nymphs" on their repertoire. But as with so many other aspects of Vaughan Williams's life and music, delving past the best-known songs reveals hidden layers and threads that run the whole length of the composer's career.

RVW is the beating heart of the English song canon, according to Peter Nicky Spence. Book from recording On the Edge of the World (release date: April 2023).

2023: "I've sung his music for as long as I can remember, and it's always been a staple of my repertoire. What I love is that when you get down to working on them, you realise that there is real depth there, so much more than just the image of the tweed-wearing, pastoral composer that we all know."

For baritone Roderick Williams, whose RVW discography is perhaps the most extensive of any currently active singer, his love for the songs sprang from his long association with another part of the composer's output: "I first got to know Vaughan Williams music through



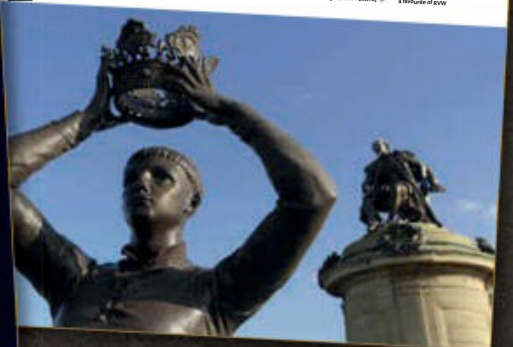
RVW and the Bard

Like many composers, Vaughan Williams was inspired by the works of Shakespeare. Although the craft of writing incidental music to plays was a skill he learned on the job, writing Stephen Connock

Shakespeare was the best friend he had. This was the first husband, love of the playwright and part as suspended for the composer, the struggle, the heartache and the nobility of Shakespeare. He also recognised that Shakespeare was thoroughly English. A writer who thought deeply about folk, he holds an surprising his own 'national' approach to music. Shakespeare makes an international appeal for the very reason that he is so national and English in his outlook.

Agitated this judgement, VW was excited at the invitation by Archbishop Howard to be part of the 1951 Festival of Britain, to conduct the orchestra as well as write and arrange incidental music to a number of Shakespeare plays for the August 1912 and April 1913 seasons at Stratford-upon-Avon (1912-1913) and his active manager who founded his own company in the spring of 1913, managing the Stratford Shakespeare Festival.

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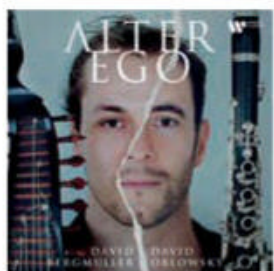
1'18" in the first movement, for instance (Bryce Dessner is a composer for the indie band The National, and the song I'm thinking of in this case is 'Afraid of everyone' from their darkly brilliant 2010 album 'High Violet'). Or try the second movement, whose opening section has the folk-pop charm of a Joni Mitchell song (from her 'Blue' period), while the subsequent *minore* section (at 1'35") is suddenly more 'classical', like a Schubert impromptu, perhaps.

The Second Sonata is grander in mood as befits its subtitle, *Requiem for the Planet*. Again, the language is pop-orientated but seems closer at times to the world of contemporary musical theatre than to album rock/pop. There are a few surprises, such as the sudden Eastern European-ish dance that appears as if out of nowhere at 2'38" in the first movement. *Circe*, according to Julian Haylock's helpful booklet note, is 'part of a larger work-in-progress inspired by Homer's *The Odyssey*, scored for piano, electric cello, rock band and electronics', and it sounds more like purely instrumental pop than an adapted song. But for me, this album's strongest work is *The Woods*, originally released as an audio addendum to a book of charcoal drawings by April Gornik. I find the greater ambiguity in Wolosoff's writing here makes for a more emotionally involving experience than the other works. I particularly like the way he has the music break apart starting around 4'00".

The performances are all excellent. Sara Sant'Ambrogio plays with warm tone and a natural feeling for Wolosoff's lyric style. There's some slight congestion in *The Woods* but otherwise the recorded sound is top-notch. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

'Alter ego'

Bergmüller Napoli Sketch 2 **Dowland** Flow my tears **Kapsberger** Toccata arpeggiata **Orlowsky** Ada **Orlowsky/Bergmüller** Eileen. Serendipity. Zeitfaltung **Preston** La mi re **Purcell** Cold Song. Dido's Lament. Mighty Powers. Music for a while **David Orlowsky** cl **David Bergmüller** lute Warner Classics (9029 63079-3 • 46')



The lyricism and novel sound world suggest moments on Ralph Towner and Paolo Fresu's 2008 album 'Chiaroscuro' (ECM). The fragility and tenderness, maybe Chet Baker singing 'My funny Valentine'. Then you watch the 'official videos'. *Eileen*, an exquisite short film by Sue Healey

featuring the 107-year-old dancer Eileen Kramer. The grungier *Cold Song* (Purcell as you've never heard him before, replete with reverb), featuring a considerably younger dancer this time, Jana Gatt. And you wish you never knew what a lute was. Or a clarinet, for that matter. Because the historical and stylistic associations only get in the way. You just want to be in a dimly lit club or small bar, in the days when they were still smoky, drinking whiskey and listening to the almost painfully intimate utterances of these two young musicians.

Clarinetist David Orlowsky and lutenist David Bergmüller have extensive 'mainstream' classical careers outside this duo. But nothing like this. Their original compositions – *Eileen*, *Ada*, *Serendipity* – are soulful, direct; their arrangements of Purcell, Dowland, Thomas Preston and Kapsberger are imaginative and enhanced by anachronistic extemporisations. But it makes no sense to talk about time, outside of rhythm. It's as though Orlowsky's sound is literally supported by the lute's, so subtle, so sensitive, so hypnotic is the playing.

If you listen to just one track, try *Mighty Powers*, an arrangement of Purcell's 'They tell us that your mighty powers above' from *The Indian Queen*. Here Orlowsky and Bergmüller brilliantly unite the folk song-like qualities of Purcell's melodic line with a continuo colouring while delightfully confounding all expectations.

'Alter ego'. Two bodies, one breath. What a gift, what a surprise this release is.

William Yeoman

'Le monde selon George Antheil'

Antheil Violin Sonata No 1 **Beethoven** Violin Sonata No 7, Op 30 No 2 **Cage** Nocturne **Feldman** Extensions I. Piece **Patricia Kopatchinskaja** vn **Joonas Ahonen** pf Alpha (ALPHA797 • 63')



Patricia Kopatchinskaja's latest programme, a typically adventurous affair, has been put together with considerable care. To open with Morton Feldman's Weberian *Piece* for violin and piano (1950) is to challenge the listener with an imperative, 'concentrate!'. It paves the way for what in my view is one of Beethoven's greatest violin sonatas. Kopatchinskaja's playing throughout has that same luminous, impish quality that makes virtually all her recordings approximate starbursts viewed from nearby:

extreme dynamics and a kaleidoscopic array of colours keep you hooked. What's old invariably sounds fresh-minted, whereas what's new comes across as familiar. Beethoven's C minor Sonata (No 7 in the cycle) is extraordinary, the opening terse and tight-lipped, the second subject and its virtuoso offshoots taut and full of shimmering energy. And yet the stunned centre at 3'50" into the first movement is as powerful in its quietened concentration as the rest is stingingly provocative.

At 2'25" into the *Adagio cantabile*, for example, Kopatchinskaja keeps deathly quiet (largely *sans* vibrato), while pianist Joonas Ahonen, who is very much on Kopatchinskaja's wavelength in terms of imagination, teases around the bar line, then both players join the fray together. The Scherzo sounds delightfully tipsy, a friendly drunk, you might say, especially the playfully jarring chords at 3'09". A miracle that the two such individual musicians could hold their nerve simultaneously. The finale is as abrupt and urgent as the Scherzo is playful, the coda (from 4'14") sounding as if gatecrashed by a wild-eyed café fiddler.

Nocturne (1947) by John Cage transports us elsewhere on a gentle breeze, initially and ultimately quiet and otherworldly. Then there's George Antheil's First Sonata (1923), written for the violinist Olga Rudge, the poet Ezra Pound's lifelong love, a cross between middle-period Bartók, Prokofiev in ballet mode (think of *Le pas d'acier*) and the Stravinsky of *The Soldier's Tale*. The first movement is often relentless (Antheil loved aircraft and fast cars) – at least its latter half is. The second recalls Szymanowski except for weird glissando effects near its close, while the third once more calls on Bartók in ostinato mode. It grabs you by the biceps, shakes you senseless and just won't let go ... until around 4'24" when it starts to tire, and the pounding is relieved by occasional rests. Not for long, though. Soon Kopatchinskaja's sound approximates a slashing knife blade. Feldman's more peaceful *Extensions I* (1951), the musical equivalent of a pigeon observing and pecking at what's around her, closes the programme.

One thing for sure is that after listening you feel that you've been places – not always places you'd want to revisit, at least not soon, I'll admit that, but the memory will linger and the experience will almost certainly have proved worthwhile. Do give it a try. Lukas Fierz's superbly written essay 'The World According to George Antheil' proves an essential listening aid.

Rob Cowan



Subtle and hypnotic: clarinetist David Orlowsky and lutenist David Bergmüller join forces for a programme that confounds expectations

'Shining Night'

JS Bach Air on G^a **Brouwer** Laude al árbol gigante^a **Corelli** La folia^a **Ellington** In My Solitude^a **Lauridsen** Dirait-on^b. Sure on this shining night^b **Paganini** Cantabile^a **Peretti/Creatore/Weiss** Can't help falling in love^a **Piazzolla** Histoire du Tango^a **Ponce** Estrellita (arr Heifetz)^b **Villa-Lobos** Bachianas Brasileiras No 5 - Aria^a

Anne Akiko Meyers *vn*

^b**Fabio Bidini** *pf* ^a**Jason Vieaux** *gtr*

Avie (AV2455 • 67')



This recording, like so many others that have come my way this year, seems aimed to offer comfort. The title, 'Shining Night', comes from a poem by James Agee that Morten Lauridsen set for chorus. Part of one stanza reads: 'The late year lies down the north. / All is healed, all is health' – apt words of hope, perhaps, for a world emerging from pervasive illness. Here, Anne Akiko Meyers plays it and another of Lauridsen's choral songs in arrangements for violin and piano made for her by the composer.

Lauridsen is a skilled composer, although these particular selections are too sweet for my taste, as is 'Can't help falling in love' (one of Elvis Presley's megahits). Happily, however, this programme is not an entire platter of sugary confections. Corelli's variations on *La folia* is quite meaty, even in a playful arrangement such as Andy Poxon's that veers into jazzy territory – listen, say, to Meyers's sultry portamentos at 3'38". And while Meyers similarly slips and slides through much of the Aria from Villa-Lobos's *Bachianas Brasileiras* No 5, she maintains such a sure rhythmic grip on the melodic line that the result sounds neither soupy nor sappy. Much the same can be said for her performance of Duke Ellington's *In My Solitude*, where she seems to be channelling Billie Holliday.

We're also given what I assume is the recording premiere of a new work written for Meyers by the Cuban composer Leo Brouwer. It's brief, yes, but in four and a half minutes, *Laude to the Giant Sequoia Tree* somehow manages to suggest a sense of both gnarled majesty and abundant life – and its up-in-the-air ending is wonderfully apt.

Piazzolla's *Histoire du Tango* suite, which sits at the recital's centre, reflects both the

sweet and savoury aspects of the programme, with an especially easy, breezy reading of the opening movement and a welcome application of tonal and emotional grit in the final two. Pianist Fabio Bidini is a sensitive partner in the Lauridsen arrangements as well as in an alluringly elegant account of Manuel Ponce's *Estrellita*, but throughout this programme it's guitarist Jason Vieaux who shines nearly as brightly as Meyers herself. He proves himself a master tone-colourist in the Villa-Lobos (one need only listen to the first dozen bars to hear how broad his palette is), gives backbone to the Corelli and vividly characterises each part of the Piazzolla. He's a remarkable player who deserves to be far better known.

Andrew Farach-Colton



Mark Reizen

Tully Potter celebrates the Ukrainian bass with a gigantic stature, sound and repertoire who made his mark in the 1920s and still had a remarkable voice in 1985, at the age of 90

At a time when Ukraine is much in our thoughts, it seems fitting to consider one of the country's foremost singers, Mark Reizen. This great bass was a giant both physically – standing two metres high in his socks – and artistically: only such names as Feodor Chaliapin, Ezio Pinza and Boris Christoff can be mentioned in the same breath. He triumphed not only in the rich panoply of Russian bass roles but also in selected Italian, French and German operas.

Reizen came from a large provincial Jewish mining family who all sang and played instruments. He sang in the synagogue and may have had cantorial training, which would explain his rapid rise once his voice was recognised. (Incidentally, Russian TV footage makes it clear that the first syllable of his name rhymes with ray rather than rye.) Like so many Ukrainian stars who made careers in the old Soviet empire (Samuil Feinberg, Alexander Gauk, Emil Gilels, Maria Grinberg, Leonid Kogan, Antonina Nezhdanova, David Oistrakh, Sviatoslav Richter), he was heard most in Moscow and St Petersburg.

The baritone and critic Sergei Levik (1883-1967) wrote: 'A great deal of hard work and patience were needed by this bass with a truly remarkable voice, superb diction, an enchanting *bel canto* technique and vivid expression – who in time also learnt to act well – in order to get to the top and become a favourite with audiences. Also singing at the same time was Grigori Pirogov, who surpassed Reizen in some ways. Alexander Pirogov's star was rising, the talent of Vasili Petrov was coming

to the fore, and the star of the ageing Vladimir Kastorsky had not yet entirely faded. To compete with them and gain a place of honour among them was no simple matter; but Reizen worked and worked and worked, and by the early 1930s was their equal in fame.'

His voice covered more than two octaves – from F below the stave to A flat above the stave – and in basic quality was surely the

most sumptuous from any eastern European bass in the last century. It was also of singular beauty and he handled it with an ease acquired from his Italian teacher Federico Bugamelli.

If, in the early years, his huge repertoire took in such works as *Les Huguenots* and *Lakmé*, we associate him most with

the roles he recorded: Méphistophélès (*Faust*), Don Basilio (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Ruslan (*Ruslan and Ludmila*), Konchak (*Prince Igor*), Salieri (*Mozart and Salieri*), Old Gypsy (*Aleko*), Prince Gremin (*Eugene Onegin*), Viking Guest (*Sadko*), Dosifey (*Khovanshchina*) and Boris (*Boris Godunov*).

Some low male voices – Chaliapin, Antonio Scotti, Pasquale Amato – can be likened to an old Italian cello, but Reizen's legato, as heard in Ivan Susanin's aria (*A Life for the Tsar*), brings finely polished mahogany to mind. His singing can be amazingly flexible, in Glinka's *Travelling Song*, say, or Farlaf's Rondo from *Ruslan and Ludmila*, or Varlaam's aria from *Boris Godunov*, or the Miller's aria from *Rusalka* – which all benefit from his exhilarating rhythm.

Chaliapin established much of the bass repertoire and it is fascinating to compare

Reizen's legato – as heard in Ivan Susanin's aria from A Life for the Tsar – brings finely polished mahogany to mind

DEFINING MOMENTS

•1895 – Born July 3, Zaitseve, now in Donetsk Oblast

Born into a musical family. While growing up, develops taste for theatre at schools in Bakhmut (now Artemovsk) and Lugansk; later serves as a soldier in the Great War, sings with regimental band, wounded twice

•1917 – Extensive studies begin

First at Kharkiv institute of technology and then at conservatory with Mascagni pupil Federico Bugamelli

•1921 – Kharkiv Opera debut as Pimen (Boris Godunov)

Then, over the course of three seasons, performs some 30 roles in total, 10 of them major including title-role in Lysenko's *Taras Bulba*

•1925 – Major Leningrad appointment

Joins the Mariinsky Theatre, until 1930. First solo concert 1926, Leningrad Philharmonic; 1928: for first time takes title-role in *Boris Godunov* (Pavel Lamm's edition)

•1929-30 – Tours western Europe

Paris: concerts and soirées; Monte Carlo: *Mefistofele* and *Il barbiere di Siviglia*; London: test records for HMV with Albert Coates at piano

•1930 – Stalin personally arranges transfer to Moscow

Becomes leading bass at Bolshoi Theatre for quarter of a century; named USSR People's Artist, 1937; Stalin Prize three times – 1941, 1949, 1951; guest appearances in Leningrad, Budapest and elsewhere

•1955 – Retires from Bolshoi, aged 60

Concentrates on recitals, concerts, TV, recordings, teaching at Gnessin school and Moscow conservatory; jurist at international competitions

•1959 – Stars as Dosifey in film of Khovanshchina

Vera Stroyeva directs; Shostakovich edits score; Evgeny Svetlanov conducts

•1985 – 90th birthday

Celebrates by singing Prince Gremin at Bolshoi

•1992 – Suffers stroke

Dies in Moscow, November 25, aged 97



Reizen as the Miller in Dargomyzhsky's *Rusalka* (late '30s) – one of many roles that benefited from the extraordinary flexibility of his voice and his exhilarating rhythm

him and Reizen in such staples as the *Song of the Volga Boatmen*, *Down the Petersky*, Mussorgsky's *The Song of the Flea*, Tchaikovsky's *Pilgrim's Song*, Glinka's *Doubt*, Rubinstein's *Persian Love Song*, or Malashkin's masterpiece once requested by a cloth-eared BBC listener as the 'Kodály Buttocks-Pressing Song' (actually *O Could I but Express in Song*).

For sheer grandeur, it would be hard to beat Reizen as the Viking Guest, three minutes of music evoking the 'cruel crags' of the Viking north in all their ruggedness; and when I played his 1950 Wotan's Farewell to a Wagnerian friend, the response was a gasp: 'He's the only one who really sounds like a god!' At the other extreme, Reizen can phrase sensitively, intimately and naturally in Schubert's *An die Musik*.

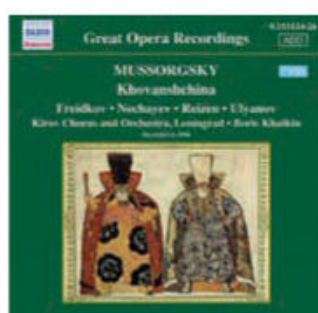
One of the two or three essential exponents of Boris, he brings a singing line, memorable tone and

'inwardness' to the role, which singles him out from the over-histrionic scenery-chewers. Yet I feel that if Chaliapin made us aware of Boris, Reizen's unique contribution to our appreciation of Mussorgsky is his vivid incarnation of Dosifey, the fiery, fervent leader of the Old Believers in *Khovanshchina*.

CD labels do well by Reizen: Preiser has two discs of arias; in Russia, IMLab has one of opera, one of song; and Aquarius has released a fascinating DVD as well as eight audio discs of

Tchaikovsky, Dargomyzhsky (including *Rusalka* excerpts, the Act 3 duet deeply touching), Lieder, Russian and Ukrainian folk songs, excerpts from *The Maid of Pskov* (with a live 1965 Wotan's Farewell) and two of Russian art songs. Profil's Mussorgsky box includes his magnificent Boris and two versions of *Khovanshchina*: the 1953 Bolshoi recording and the 1959 film soundtrack. ⑥

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Mussorgsky (ed Rimsky-Korsakov)

Khovanshchina.

Kirov Chorus and Orchestra / Boris Khaikin
Naxos

Reizen's Dosifey enters in Act 1, scene 6, and thereafter dominates the action, alongside mezzo Sofia Preobrazhenskaya as Marfa. The rest of the cast is superb,

as is Khaikin's conducting, and the sound of Ward Marston's restoration of this 1946 recording in what was then Leningrad is astonishingly fine. An appendix here of Mussorgsky songs includes Reizen's interpretations of *The Song of the Flea* and *The Seminarist*.

Instrumental



Jed Distler hears a fine Schumann album from Martin Helmchen:

'He thoroughly revels in the restless movement and rapid mood-shifts characterising the Novelletten' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 73](#)



Charlotte Gardner welcomes an impressive solo violin debut:

'The intellectual and poetic accomplishment with which Saluste-Bridoux handles contrapuntal complexity is mesmerising' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 74](#)

Albéniz

Iberia

Nelson Goerner *pf*

Alpha (ALPHA829 • 83')



Aside from navigating its considerable technical hurdles and textural complexities,

pianists who take on *Iberia* must convey idiomatic affinity and diversity of character throughout its 12 movements. Happily, Nelson Goerner achieves these goals with nearly total success.

In the opening 'Evocación', Goerner's yielding and highly internalised rubato creates a darkly wistful atmosphere. He doesn't push the heel-clicking tempo of 'El Puerto' to Andrew Tyson's giddy heights (Alpha, A/19), favouring instead a moderate pace that allows the inventive harmonies and fistfuls of chords to resonate fully. One can say the same for the beautifully rounded yet still incisive quality of the percussive phrases in 'El Corpus en Sevilla', and how Goerner minimises the high-register right-hand writing's clattery tendencies.

Goerner may not quite match Miguel Baselga's way of 'swinging' the rhythmic patterns of 'Rondeña' (BIS, 12/21), yet his careful attention to articulation and dynamics leads to a more assiduous and exultant reading. The lyrical sections of 'Almería' benefit from Goerner's hypnotic legato and soft playing of remarkable delicacy, although his climactic right-hand chords supported by rapid left-hand runs are heavy going when compared alongside Marc-André Hamelin's effortless suavity (Hyperion, 6/05). On the other hand, the familiar 'Triana' emerges freshly through Goerner's sharp yet subtly varied accents and voicings.

These words equally apply to his pinpointed textural layering in 'El Albaicín'. I love the spicy hesitations and points of emphasis in 'El Polo', even if the music sometimes lilts impatiently,

in contrast to Rafael Orozco's expansively sexy reading (Naïve, 11/92). Yet the vivacity and almost cartoonish dynamic contrasts in 'Lavapiés' won me over, and 'Málaga' gushes forth as a fluid and sweeping entity. Goerner eloquently sustains his measured and introspective conception of the lengthy 'Jerez'. Here, however, I prefer Roger Muraro's faster, terser and more firmly delineated traversal (Accord). 'Eritaña', however, concludes on a decisive and disciplined note, and one realises that the album's 83-minute playing time has gone by in a flash. In sum, here's another *Iberia* that can hold its own in Alicia de Larrocha's standard-setting company. **Jed Distler**

JS Bach

English Suites - No 3, BWV808; No 5, BWV810.
Keyboard Partitas - No 1, BWV825; No 4, BWV828. Das wohltemperirte Clavier, Book 2: Preludes and Fugues - BWV873; BWV874; BWV890; BWV891

Lillian Gordis *hpd*

Paraty (PTY1521 280 • 138')



Some charming playing here from California-born, Paris-based

harpsichordist Lillian Gordis, and what's perhaps even more special is how much it leaves one thinking. There's a generous amount of chew and elasticity to the Partita No 1 in B flat that opens the first disc. Take the Allemande: Gordis plays with so much agogic sway that it's as if the music has a wriggling life of its own. I particularly enjoy the care with which Gordis touches the low Gs in bars 28 and 29 – the non-alignment of these first beats is extremely sexy – and the harpsichord practically purrs in majesty. But what we gain in meandering introspection, we lose in dynamism. When Gordis navigates the repeat of the first section, there's little or no sense of propulsion. Indeed, I'm not sure why

we gain so much time at the three instances of navigating the double bars. Gone is all sense of the 'common' C time signature. It's an interesting effect, certainly, one that unambiguously breathes the binary structure of the movement. This listener, however, desires a large-scale logic that transgresses page-breaks.

The following movement, the Corrente, has exactly what I desire for the Allemande. Gordis creates a wash of sound that is somehow still cleanly articulated, and her playing flows with unhurried momentum. Its end is entirely lovely – if not slightly cheeky in its palpable delay of the penultimate (anticipatory) note.

This plain-talking feistiness colours many moments. The *English Suite* No 5 in E minor is incredibly difficult music to commit to disc. Gordis's performance of the Prelude is impressive: the different figurations are well characterised, and I love the syncopated, flick-of-the-hair emphasis on the second quaver beat of the bar. Such details breathe necessary freshness into what is an extremely wrought contrapuntal structure. The whole thing feels far more epic than its duration of 5'11" would suggest.

The final movement of the Suite, the Gigue, however, is not quite as successful. Bach's complex texture requires a touch that does not amplify its tangled aspects. The moments of extreme rubato, while just about intelligible, do not help to elucidate what is already very difficult music to follow.

Mark Seow

Bolcom

'The Complete Rags'

Marc-André Hamelin *pf*

Hyperion © CDA68391/2 (133' • DDD)



Hamelin and Bolcom are old friends on disc and in life. Back in 1987, the young



Clarity of thought and feeling: Zlata Chochieva's latest album programmes an unusual combination of Mozart and Scriabin – see review on page 70

Canadian recorded *Twelve New Études* as part of his prize for having won the 1985 Carnegie Hall International American Music Competition. (No 8, not incidentally, is entitled 'Rag infernal (Syncopes apocalyptiques)', a curious omission from the present collection, though admittedly very different in character to the 27 numbers in this set.) Subsequently, Hamelin coupled Bolcom's Piano Concerto with Bernstein's *The Age of Anxiety* (Hyperion, 11/00); with Jody Applebaum he recorded Bolcom's *Twelve Cabaret Songs* as well as his big hit 'Lime jello marshmallow cottage cheese surprise' (Music & Arts, and also on their Albany collection 'Serious Fun!').

Bolcom's obsession with rags began in 1967, before the revival of interest in the works of Scott Joplin (headlined by Joshua Rifkin and their use in *The Sting*), Joseph Lamb, James Scott and others. They fall into two basic categories: breezy two-steps (think Joplin's *The Favourite* and *Elite Syncopations*) and the languorous and melancholy (*Eugenia*, *Solace*). His best ones, to my mind, are the earlier ones, those that rely on the classic structure of ragtime and have strong, memorable themes. Without these elements, there is the possibility of

one sounding very much like another due to the repetition of the same syncopated patterns. This is largely avoided here, with the numbers being sensibly arranged to provide contrast rather than being ordered chronologically.

Everyone will have their own favourites. *Knockout 'A Rag'* (with knuckles on the fallboard), *California Porcupine Rag* and the four titles that comprise *The Garden of Eden* are this listener's standouts on disc 1, together with the opening pages of *Eubie's Luckey Day* (named for the inimitable 'Eubie' Blake, whom Bolcom considers to be his 'last great teacher'), which rather outstays its welcome.

One treasure follows another on disc 2. It is no coincidence that by far the most famous number in the collection, 'Graceful Ghost Rag' (the first of *Three Ghost Rags*), has also the most singable (and touching) of all Bolcom's melodies; the dissonant *Estela 'Rag Latino'* from 2010, with its echoes of Joplin's contemporary Ernesto Nazareth, is followed by the haunting *Fields of Flowers* (1977) and the romping *Incineratorag* (1967). Good programming. *Last Rag* (1968), one of the earliest of the canon, is the penultimate track. Good joke. The last rag on the disc is *Brass Knuckles* (1969),

written in collaboration with William Albright, and bears instructions such as 'brutish' and 'loutish'.

Hamelin is a pianist who loves interpreting this kind of instruction. Indeed, Bolcom is lucky in having such a musician to provide him with these authoritative accounts of his music. Individual rags will undoubtedly pop up on recital discs from time to time (at least, they should) but any further 'Complete Rags' will be completely redundant. Hamelin's razor-sharp rhythmic acuity and precise accentuation in tandem with his customary nonchalant dexterity would, on their own, be sufficient for the success of this release, but there are other things: a sophisticated palette, a deep tenderness, a mischievous sense of humour and the chameleon's ability to convince you that he is not a classical pianist but, first and foremost, a successor to James P Johnson. There is more. I doubt if there's another pianist on the planet who, after giving us a revelatory two-disc survey of CPE Bach (2/22), could so adroitly turn his attention to late 20th-century ragtime. The man is a miracle. Another *Gramophone* Award nomination beckons.

Jeremy Nicholas

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Chopin

Piano Sonata No 3, Op 58. Four Ballades

Jae-Hyuck Cho *pf*

Orchid (ORC100193 • 66')



In his booklet notes for Chopin's Ballades and Piano Sonata No 3, Jae-Hyuck Cho

speaks of his goal to attain a genuine, singing legato on the piano. One suspects that this quest is at least partially informed by the fact that this pianist also is an accomplished organist.

Certainly his full-bodied sonority and forceful yet rounded sense of projection avoid any trace of percussiveness. The G minor First Ballade's climaxes resonate with a strong left-hand presence, and the coda's scales define smoothness. At the same time, there's not much contrast in character, and the section featuring the E flat major theme frankly drags. While the F major Second Ballade's agitated A minor episodes retain uncommon definition and never splinter or lapse into banging, Cho's uniform articulation and square phrasing lose interest quickly. The A flat Third Ballade's first half displays a playful, supple side of the pianist that becomes heavier and less poetic later on. In a catalogue that abounds with diversely imaginative F minor Fourth Ballade recordings from Cziffra to Rubinstein and hundreds in between, there's simply no room for Cho's straitjacketed and plodding opening pages or dead-accurate yet less than scintillating coda.

Somehow the B minor Third Piano Sonata can withstand Cho's slightly Brahmsian approach, where the first-movement development's elaborate counterpoint emerges from the bottom up, so to speak, with more than usual attention to bass lines. The same holds true in the Scherzo's Trio, while strong left-hand underpinning helps keep the *Largo* moving and afloat. Cho takes the finale's introductory bars in strict tempo, which accurately presages the forthright and uncluttered account up ahead. It lacks the nuance, the colourful dimension and the lightness of being that one has come to expect from this movement since Martha Argerich set the modern-day reference standard. In short, the best of Cho's Chopin pianism elicits respect rather than affection from these quarters.

Jed Distler

Piano Sonata No 3 – selected comparison:

Argerich

Warner Classics 9029 66976-7 (5/68)

S Fuga

Piano Sonatas – No 1^a; No 2^b; No 3^c

^bCarlotta Fuga, ^aGiacomo Fuga,

^cClaudio Voghera *pf*

Naxos (8 579110 • 72')



Sandro Fuga (1906–94) came from a northern Italian family of

painters and sculptors with – at several removes – the composer Luigi Nono as a cousin. Based mostly in Turin, his teachers included the composers Ghedini and Franco Alfano (who famously completed Puccini's *Turandot*). Fuga's son, Giacomo, and daughter, Carlotta – who here perform respectively the First and Second Piano Sonatas – have kept his name alive in Italy, and recordings have appeared on Naxos (the three violin sonatas, with Giacomo accompanying three different violinists, 2014) and, more recently, Tactus (the three cello sonatas, 2021; No 1 is also available on Naxos). There is also a historic recording of Fuga himself at the piano (Dynamic CDS001).

Instrumental music was Fuga's principal interest, his output for the piano spread throughout his career. The three sonatas date respectively from 1957, 1976 and 1980. The expansive First seems a representative example of his instrumental style, well made, conventionally based in tonality and the classic forms from north of the Alps. Fuga may have learnt from some contemporaries but the composer who – although not mentioned in Flavio Menardi Noguera's informative if rather generalised booklet essay – to my ears hovers most influentially over all is Busoni, who also had a foot in the Italian and German traditions.

Despite *Tormentoso* and *Agitato* markings in the First Sonata, there is an intriguing emotional detachment to the music's richly teeming expression, as if being observed rather than felt by the composer. This feeling pervades all four movements, reaching its climax in the finale's serene resolve. The more compact, three-movement Second is very different again, as is the more volatile Third, this last played by Turin-based Claudio Voghera. The performances are thoughtful and highly expressive, though the piano tone is not always of the best. Nonetheless, a fascinating programme of a composer I want to hear more.

Guy Rickards

Messiaen



Cheung Live Ear Emission! Harvey Tombeau de Messiaen Kurtág ... humble regard sur Olivier Messiaen ... Messiaen Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus Murail Cloches d'adieu, et un sourire ... Takemitsu Rain Tree Sketch II

Bertrand Chamayou *pf*

Erato (9029 61966-6 @ • 142')



It's always a thrill, and a privilege, to return to Messiaen's mighty masterpiece. And this

new one got me thinking about musical legacy. Without the supreme example of Yvonne Loriod – Messiaen's muse, champion and later wife – who knows how well *Vingt Regards* might have fared? And she in turn taught and inspired the next generation of artists, Pierre-Laurent Aimard among them.

Since then, a younger generation has adopted the piece as its own – notable among them Steven Osborne, Martin Helmchen and now Bertrand Chamayou. In his booklet he ponders the subject of mysticism and talks movingly of how his discovery of the piece as a boy proved life-changing.

And Chamayou does something inspired in bookending *Vingt Regards* with Messiaen homages. I was sceptical, particularly about having anything after the final Regard, but he won me over. Anthony Cheung's piece sets things in lively motion, while his choices of exquisite Kurtág (as tiny as the Messiaen is epic) and Harvey's ear-bending *Tombeau de Messiaen* turned out to be inspired. The production values are first-rate, too – it's no mean feat to have captured such a wide-ranging piano sound and dynamic so truthfully and the Steinway technician deserves heartfelt applause.

How to sum up this performance? From the start there's an easy flow to his tempos, notably faster in the opening Regard than Helmchen or Osborne, and close in effect to Aimard and the even speedier Loriod, though within that Chamayou draws out a more subtle array of colours. The three decades he has spent in the company of this music have paid off brilliantly, not least in the way he reveals the building blocks from which this mighty masterpiece is cast – the 'Theme of God', 'Theme of the Star and of the Cross' and 'Theme of Chords'. They function rather like Wagnerian leitmotifs, and Chamayou is a master of pointing them out without disturbing the inherent complexity and richness of textures.

Above all, what impresses is how profoundly nuanced his playing is –

holding the sometimes conflicting elements in balance: in the fourth Regard, for instance, the 'Gaze of the Virgin', Chamayou lulls you with the softness of his playing, while also conveying a disquietingly obsessive quality. In the fifth ('Gaze of the Son upon the Son'), even if he can't quite match Osborne's daringly hushed playing, the way he introduces the birdsong with such an improvisatory élan is beautifully judged. In the sixth, 'By Him was everything made', Chamayou truly lets rip, similar in tempo to Osborne but more trenchant; Loriod, by comparison, almost seems to be doing slow practice at this point.

The 10th Regard ('Gaze of the Spirit of Joy') is as fast and furious as I've ever heard it – Chamayou's virtuosity always at the service of the music. This is followed by a Regard that sets off in truly awestruck manner, yet with the most ethereally etched filigree. Just occasionally I wanted something more awestruck in effect – Osborne is daringly drawn out in the famous 15th ('The Kiss of the Infant Jesus') but it works because of his sheer focus. Chamayou, more flowing, is undoubtedly high on joy, though.

But the way Chamayou senses connections between the numbers to maintain the narrative is second to none. The 18th Regard tumbles from the quiet and high-lying No 17 into the depths with rare emotional impact, while he takes us from the penultimate Regard ('I sleep, but my heart keeps watch') into the epic closing one ('Gaze of the Church of Love') with a focus and unfettered emotionalism that underline the fact that for Chamayou this journey is an entirely personal one, and all the more powerful for it. **Harriet Smith**

Vingt Regards – selected comparisons:

Loriod Teldec 2564 69986-5 (4/89, 12/94)

Aimard Teldec 3984 26868-2 (4/00)

Osborne Hyperion CDA67351/2 (10/02)

Helmchen Alpha ALPHA423 (7/19)

► See our interview with Bertrand Chamayou on page 28

Mozart · Scriabin

'Chiaroscuro'

Mozart Gigue, K574. Variations – on a Minuet by Duport, K573; on Gluck's 'Unser dumme Pöbel meint', K455 **Scriabin** Piano Sonatas – No 3, Op 23; No 10, Op 70. Five Preludes – Op 15; Op 16 **Zlata Chochieva** *pf*
Naïve (V7542 • 76')



Zlata Chochieva, whose beautiful sound at the piano is of a silvery, crystalline

clarity, has chosen to juxtapose Mozart and Scriabin on her latest release, which is called 'Chiaroscuro' – contrasted light and shadow. Chochieva studied in Moscow with Mikhail Pletnev and Pavel Nersessian, and did graduate work at the Salzburg Mozarteum with Jacques Rouvier. Among her recordings are Études by Chopin and Rachmaninov.

One can well understand how, in the booklet interview, Chochieva speaks of Scriabin as the great musical love of her childhood. In the two sonatas especially, one hears an extraordinary ebb and flow, a clarity of thought and feeling that progresses with a logical inevitability and cohesion unusual in even the finest Scriabin-playing. In the Op 23 Sonata, for instance, even if one might wish for greater contrasts between, say, *fff* and *pp*, there's no question that Chochieva is the master of the architectural overview. Arrival at the *Andante* seems like achieving the summit of a plateau of bliss, with breathtaking vistas stretching in every direction. The last Sonata, Op 70, ushers in a unique world of mysterious ambivalence, inexorably wrought, tinged with desperation.

Nor is Chochieva less adept at striking the perfectly proportionate spark for the Scriabin miniatures. To take the first three preludes of Op 16, for example, the first in B major stretches to encompass vast spaces with simplicity and ease. The second in G sharp minor flutters nervously yet free of neuroses, while the third in G flat wanders thoughtfully, unfolding as though it were an improvisation, each with its own perfectly delineated character and purpose.

If only these Mozart interpretations approached the Scriabin readings in rootedness, relevance or style. If Chochieva's beautiful sound prevails, these pieces sound held at an arm's length rather than inhabited. 'Preciousness', in the late 19th-century Dresden china doll sense, fairly emasculates and deracinates contemporary ideas of Mozart interpretation. The playful virtuosity that is so much a part of these variation sets, for instance, can come off here as though it were dutifully executed Czerny.

Given the undeniable quality of Chochieva's Scriabin, perhaps the solution here is a quick listen with half an ear to the Mozart, followed by full luxuriation in the lovely realisations of the Silver Age Russian. **Patrick Rucker**

Prokofiev

Piano Sonatas – No 1, Op 1; No 3, Op 28; No 5, Op 135. Visions fugitives, Op 22 **Alexander Melnikov** *pf*
Harmonia Mundi (HMM90 2204 • 50')



Alexander Melnikov's excellent Prokofiev sonatas series concludes with

three of the most modest of the nine. Not that 'modest' is generally a good fit with Prokofiev. But it does at least apply to the eight-minute duration of the single-movement Nos 1 and 3, both of which are based on pre-Op 1 ideas. I was somehow expecting Melnikov to take a more headlong approach to the Scriabinesque flights of No 1, and he would obviously be fully capable of that. But his relatively restrained tempos, with plenty of subtle yielding in the lyrical contrasting sections, bring their own rewards. So, too, in No 3 the tumult of the tarantella-like main theme is never allowed to gain the upper hand over lucidity, and the benefits are felt when textures accumulate without detriment to clarity or the basic tempo.

The Fifth Sonata was the only one to be composed during Prokofiev's years in the West, and it is in some ways the hardest to make convincing – whether in its 1923 original form or, as here, in the 1952-53 revision. Melnikov's crispness again pays high dividends. He does not allow the first movement's curious *Allegro tranquillo* marking to lead him into complacency, and the high level of intensity he sustains serves the music well. He clearly senses that the second movement emanates from the same piquant, stylised world as the 'Blues' middle movement of Ravel's Violin Sonata, which was composed not long afterwards (and which is – Prokofiev lovers forgive me – a good deal more memorable). Without quite making the case for Prokofiev's finale as a worthy companion to his Soviet-era sonatas yet to come, Melnikov does succeed in bringing out some of its proto-epic qualities.

Melnikov's *Visions fugitives* are bursting with character, but perhaps not so conspicuously as to make you want to drop everything to hear them. I've heard more hurtling tempos in some of the faster pieces (such as the No 5 *Molto giocoso*) and more searching accounts of some of the more poetic ones (such as No 18).

The piano sound is not of the richest – anything in the top octave sounds rather tinny. All in all, this is a worthy conclusion to a fine series but perhaps not one that taken in isolation makes urgent claims on the collector. **David Fanning**

Reusner

'Delitiae testudinis'

Lute Suites – No 6 – Allemanda; No 9; No 11;
No 13. Chaconne, ou Cascades de Mr de Launay.
Praeludium in F. Wir glauben all an einen Gott

William Carter *lute*

Linn ① CKD679 (73' • DDD)



I'm not sure how much William Carter knows about necromancy or

quantum physics. But the search for meaning through communicating with the dead, the manipulation of the subtlest matter ... well, it's all here, and more, in Carter's first solo outing for some years.

Esaias Reusner (1636-79) isn't exactly a household name. But he should be better known. Because, as Carter points out, the German lutenist and composer's *Delitiae testudinis* (1667) 'contains several milestones', not least the first known publication of the Baroque dance suite. Carter has selected three complete suites from *Delitiae testudinis* and a handful of other pieces including the wonderful *Chaconne, ou Cascades de Mr de Launay* (I'm a sucker for a good chaconne or passacaglia).

William Waters and Paul Beier have devoted recordings to Reusner's music, on Brilliant and Stradivarius respectively. There have also been bits and bobs from Walter Gerwig back in the 1950s (very good it is, too – Archiv, 7/58) and Julian Bream in the 1960s through to more recent offerings from Stephen Stubbs and Jakob Lindberg (who plays an actual Sixtus Rauwolf – BIS, 1/18; Carter plays a copy, but an excellent one). What sets Carter apart are those qualities I somewhat facetiously alluded to at the start, and which have always been hallmarks of Carter's playing: specifically, a willingness to evoke the past through the subtlest, most sensitive means.

In the giges and courantes there is that underlying rhythmic urgency which manifests itself most obviously as a strumming in the Chaconne. This is honouring the dance origins of the music. The preludes, allemandes, sarabandes and more unusual paduanas, on the other hand, become under Carter's fingers laboratories for reverie and reflection. This is honouring the 'pervasive melancholy' (Carter) of Reusner's music.

Sensitive, stylish, intelligent playing. Artistry that doesn't draw attention to itself. It's good to have you back, Bill.

William Yeoman

Schubert

Piano Sonata No 21, D960.

Drei Klavierstücke, D946

Ayako Ito *fp*

Challenge Classics (CC72892 • 69')



For more than two decades Ayako Ito has been performing on period pianos,

such as the one built by Christopher Clarke modelled on a Conrad Graf instrument from c1826 that's featured on this release. Ito's booklet notes make a case for the vocal quality of this particular piano's treble register, as well as the bass register's 'rumbling of hell'. To my ears, however, the low trill in the B flat Sonata's first ending murmurs more than menaces, while everything above middle C conveys a slightly fuzzy patina that borders on distortion. Perhaps it's the engineering talking, yet the Graf model pales in comparison with the clarity and timbral diversity distinguishing the 1829 Viennese Franz Brodmann model used by András Schiff in his ECM recordings.

Such sonic quibbles are further compounded by Ito's sensitive yet



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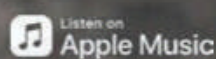
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M. Butterfly

蝴蝶君

MUSIC

Huang Ruo

LIBRETTO

David Henry Hwang

8:30 pm July 30

8 pm August 3, 12, 18, 24



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Georges Bizet

THE BARBER
OF SEVILLE

Gioachino Rossini

FALSTAFF

Giuseppe Verdi

TRISTAN UND
ISOLDE

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prosaic music-making. Her careful tempos and square phrasing in the sonata's third and fourth movements are cases in point. While Ito paces the *Andante sostenuto* at an ideal 'walking pace', her persistently accented down-beats and overall lack of a long line hold little attraction.

The three *Klavierstücke* fare no better. Ito's effortful and inconsistently balanced handling of No 1 in E flat minor lacks urgency and drive. No 3 in C proceeds with caution at a slower tempo than Schubert's *Allegro* implies, and Ito flattens out the music's rabble-rousing cross-rhythmic interplay. My reservations about the aforementioned sonata's *Andante* also apply to D946's central piece.

For collectors who want these works on fortepiano, Andreas Staier's Teldec recordings remain at the head of the class, if you can find them. **Jed Distler**

C & R Schumann

C Schumann *Soirées musicales*, Op 6 - No 1,

Toccata; No 2, Notturmo; No 5, Mazurka

R Schumann *Gesänge der Frühe*, Op 133.

Acht Novelletten, Op 21

Martin Helmchen *pf*

Alpha (ALPHA857 • 70')



The 1860 Bechstein pianoforte featured in the present recording is apparently a model

identical to one of Franz Liszt's preferred instruments. While its sonorities sound musty in relation to modern-day concert grands, its timbral distinctions from one register to another and wealth of colours cannot be denied. What is more, the piano appears to be quite responsive under Martin Helmchen's nimble fingers, and holds its tuning well.

More importantly, Helmchen thoroughly revels in the restless movement and rapid mood-shifts characterising Schumann's *Novellen*. The quasi-martial spirit of No 1's outer sections slightly lingers in the tender central episode, where Helmchen colours the imitative lines like a master orchestrator. No 2 goes like the wind, yet it soars more than rushes. Helmchen clarifies No 3's *détaché* phrases and close-lying counterpoint with subtle hesitations and points of emphasis. By playing up the syncopations and cross-rhythmic phrases, he brings out the disquieting subtext behind No 4's waltzing surface charm, while the pianist's joyous and characterfully diverse romp through No 5 minimises the music's tendency to overstay its welcome.

Conversely, Helmchen resists the usual temptation to rush No 6's block chords, yet his shapely articulation makes the interpretation sound faster than it actually is. And notwithstanding the instrument's limited sustaining power, notice the fullness and weight of No 7's spread chords. As for the epic-scaled No 8, Helmchen gives each section a distinct point of view, yet still manages to integrate them into a cohesive and cumulatively satisfying entity, worthy of comparison alongside the classic Dino Ciani (Stradivarius) and Claudio Arrau recordings (Philips, 2/75).

Clara Schumann's three *Soirées musicales* also benefit from Helmchen's vividly detailed and stylistically spot-on treatments. His controlled soft playing creates an appropriately desolate yet oddly serene sound world in Robert Schumann's late *Gesänge der Frühe*, from No 1's disembodied chorale-like moments and No 2's linear independence to the vocal quality of No 5's carefully drawn climaxes. Let's hope that Helmchen and his vintage Bechstein are destined for further rewarding musical ventures. **Jed Distler**

'The Art of Duo-Piano Playing'

JS Bach Concertos - BWV593; BWV1061^a. Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland, BWV61. Sonata, BWV1031 - Sicilienne **Brahms** Liebeslieder Waltzes, Op 52a^b. Variations on a Theme of Haydn, Op 56b **Chopin** Rondo, Op posth 73 **Cui** Orientale, Op 50 No 9 **Debussy** *Lindaraja* **Falla** El Amor brujo - Ritual Fire Dance **Glinka** The Lark **Handel** Suite No 7, HWV432 - Passacaglia **Khachaturian** Three Pieces **Kreisler** Tambourin chinois, Op 3 **Levitzi** Valse tzigane, Op 7 **Luboshutz** The Bat **H McDonald** Concerto for Two Pianos^c **Mendelssohn** Allegro brillant, Op 92. A Midsummer Night's Dream, Op 61 - Scherzo **Milhaud** Scaramouche, Op 165b **Mozart** Concerto for Two Pianos, K365^a. Le nozze di Figaro - Overture. Sonata for Two Pianos, K448 **Mussorgsky** Boris Godunov - Coronation Scene **Portnoff** Perpetual Motion on Brahms's Vergebliches Ständchen **Reger** Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue, Op 96 **Riegger** New Dance, Op 18 - Finale **Rossini** Il barbiere di Siviglia - Largo al factotum **Saint-Saëns** Danse macabre, Op 40. Variations on a Theme of Beethoven, Op 35 **Schumann** Andante and Variations, Op 46 **Shostakovich** The Age of Gold, Op 22 - Polka. The Golden Mountains, Op 30 - Waltz **R Strauss** Der Rosenkavalier - Waltzes **Stravinsky** *Petrushka* - Danse russe **Weber** Violin Sonata No 3 - Rondo **Pierre Luboshutz, Genia Nemenoff** *pfs* with ^bVictor Chorale / Robert Shaw; ^aBoston Symphony Orchestra / Serge Koussevitzky; ^cPhiladelphia Orchestra / Harl McDonald

Marston (54010-2 ④ • 5h 15' • ADD)

Recorded 1938-c1962

Available from marstonrecords.com



Though not as well known in the UK and Europe as they were in the US, the piano duo of Pierre Luboshutz (1890-1971) and Genia Nemenoff (1905-89) were hugely successful from around 1937 until their retirement in 1960. Selections of their recordings have appeared over the years (notably on some hard-to-find US-only Naxos CDs). There has never been a collection like this, curated and annotated with the usual care and authority by the Marston team.

Disc 1 begins with the great, life-enhancing work that is Mozart's D major Sonata for two pianos. And this is a great, life-enhancing performance that has shot up to pole position as far as I am concerned, outshining even the celebrated recording by the Lhevinnes. The sprung rhythms, clarity and lightness of texture are a joy, each pianist bouncing off the other as they negotiate those tricky moments that Mozart throws at the players with a mischievous wink. After that comes the Mozart Concerto for two pianos in a performance with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the spacious acoustic of Symphony Hall, Boston, under their lifelong friend Serge Koussevitzky. If red-blooded, big-orchestra Mozart is not your thing, you'll be missing out on another scintillating performance (the live 1938 recording has only just surfaced). The rest of this first disc has Chopin, Schumann and Mendelssohn titles from a 1945 RCA Victor album rounded off by Isidor Philipp's arrangement of the Scherzo from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1941).

Discs 2, 3 and 4 are a repertoire junkie's treasure trove, though, it must be admitted, with variable degrees of sonic and musical satisfaction. Luboshutz's fantasy from *Die Fledermaus*, for instance, is episodic in construction, cautious in execution and boxy in sound, while you may need to lie down in a dark room after his full-on arrangements of the Ritual Fire Dance and the Coronation scene from *Boris Godunov*. Other titles more than make up for these, played with light hearts and a light touch: the Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro* and 'Largo al factotum' glitter and scintillate; as for the two Shostakovich arrangements (Luboshutz again), the Polka is as comically deadpan as you'll ever hear, the Waltz swooningly Viennese.

The third disc opens with an enjoyably robust account of Brahms's *Haydn* Variations succeeded by the 16 *Liebeslieder Waltzes* with, enchantingly, the unexpected appearance of the Victor Chorale conducted by Robert Shaw, albeit in rather constricted 1946 Victor sound. Among further Bach arrangements is another from Isidor Philipp: the Organ Concerto after Vivaldi, BWV593. It's the two-piano equivalent of Eugene Goossens's overblown arrangement of *Messiah* and I loved every minute of it, with Luboshutz and Nemenoff using the full dynamic resources of their instruments. Compare that with the July 1947 broadcast performance of Bach's Concerto in C for two pianos, BWV1061, which concludes the disc – airy, buoyant, stylish – with a reduced chamber-size Boston Symphony Orchestra conducted again by Koussevitzky. Marston, admirably, retains the applause and station announcement.

Debussy's *Lindaraja*, Saint-Saëns's *Variations on a Theme of Beethoven* (terrific performance) and Reger's hefty (17'52") *Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue* are among the fourth disc's riches. The last work is also this set's final USP: a live recording from 1944 of the Concerto for two pianos by the forgotten Harl McDonald (1899-1955) with the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by the composer. This is such an entertaining romp of a work that its neglect by today's piano duos is a mystery (its only modern recording is by the excellent Long sisters on Sono Luminus). The 1937 premiere recording (Jeanne Behrend and Alexander Kelberine under Stokowski, also with the Philadelphia) favours the orchestra above the pianos. Here, it is the other way round. A 47-page (English only) booklet with a wealth of photographs is the cherry on the top of this unexpected box of delights.

Jeremy Nicholas

'Enigma'

Chopin Berceuse, Op 57. Piano Sonata No 2, Op 35 **B Evans** Peace Piece **Kapustin** Piano Sonata No 1, 'Sonata-Fantasia', Op 39 **Mitchell** Our Hearts Dance the Infinite (As the Giant Puya Blooms) **Spanswick** Enigma **Yuki Negishi** *pf* Quartz (QTZ2139 • 64')



Is there a more audacious way to commence your solo debut recording than by diving into Nikolai Kapustin's wildly rhapsodic First Piano Sonata? Especially

if you've got Yuki Negishi's fast, well-oiled and supremely confident fingers. The totality of the sonata could be described as Oscar Peterson, Stephen Sondheim, Bill Evans and Astor Piazzolla collectively imbibing tequila spiked with LSD and steroids. Negishi plays the notes staggeringly well, yet the outer movements lack the foreground/background textural clarity, variety of articulation and sense of design that distinguish both the composer's own and Steven Osborne's (Hyperion, 8/00) recordings.

However, the musically conservative yet pianistically ingenuous title selection by noted educator, writer and pianist Melanie Spanswick receives an ideal premiere performance, and clearly suits Negishi's strengths. By contrast, Robert Mitchell's *Our Hearts Dance the Infinite*'s less defined tonality takes far less advantage of the piano's (or pianist's) potential, especially when heard in the context of Kapustin and Spanswick.

Or Chopin, for that matter. Here, Negishi's square and often overly loud Berceuse can't begin to compete alongside even the catalogue's 'B-list' versions, let alone Murray Perahia's reference traversal (Sony, 12/85). Her Chopin 'Funeral March' Sonata features an impressively impetuous first movement, a slightly heavy and tepid Scherzo (microphone shyness in those notorious leaps?) and a more fluid and moderately paced Funeral March than we usually hear from young pianists who habitually drag out the music in the name of profundity. She begins the unison finale at a promising clip, only to quickly settle down into a measured lope, rather than evoking wind over the graveyard.

As for Bill Evans's classic improvised masterpiece *Peace Piece* (why isn't any transcriber credited here?), Negishi's hammered-out and dynamically undifferentiated pianism totally misses the spirit and point of the original. Not that one needs to imitate Evans's recording: Jean-Yves Thibaudet, for example, plays it slower and freer, yet he still creates a meaningful sound world (Decca, 6/97), as does Igor Levit in his sensitively inflected interpretation (Sony, 11/18). In short, Negishi has plenty of technique and energy but she needs a healthy dose of deep listening. **Jed Distler**

'Ostinata'

Bacewicz Solo Violin Sonata No 2 **Bartók** Solo Violin Sonata, Sz117 **Biber** Passacaglia, 'The Guardian Angel' **Prokofiev** Solo Violin Sonata, Op 115 **Ysaÿe** Solo Violin Sonata, Op 27 No 4 **Charlotte Saluste-Bridoux** *vn*

Champs Hill (CHRC158 • 71')

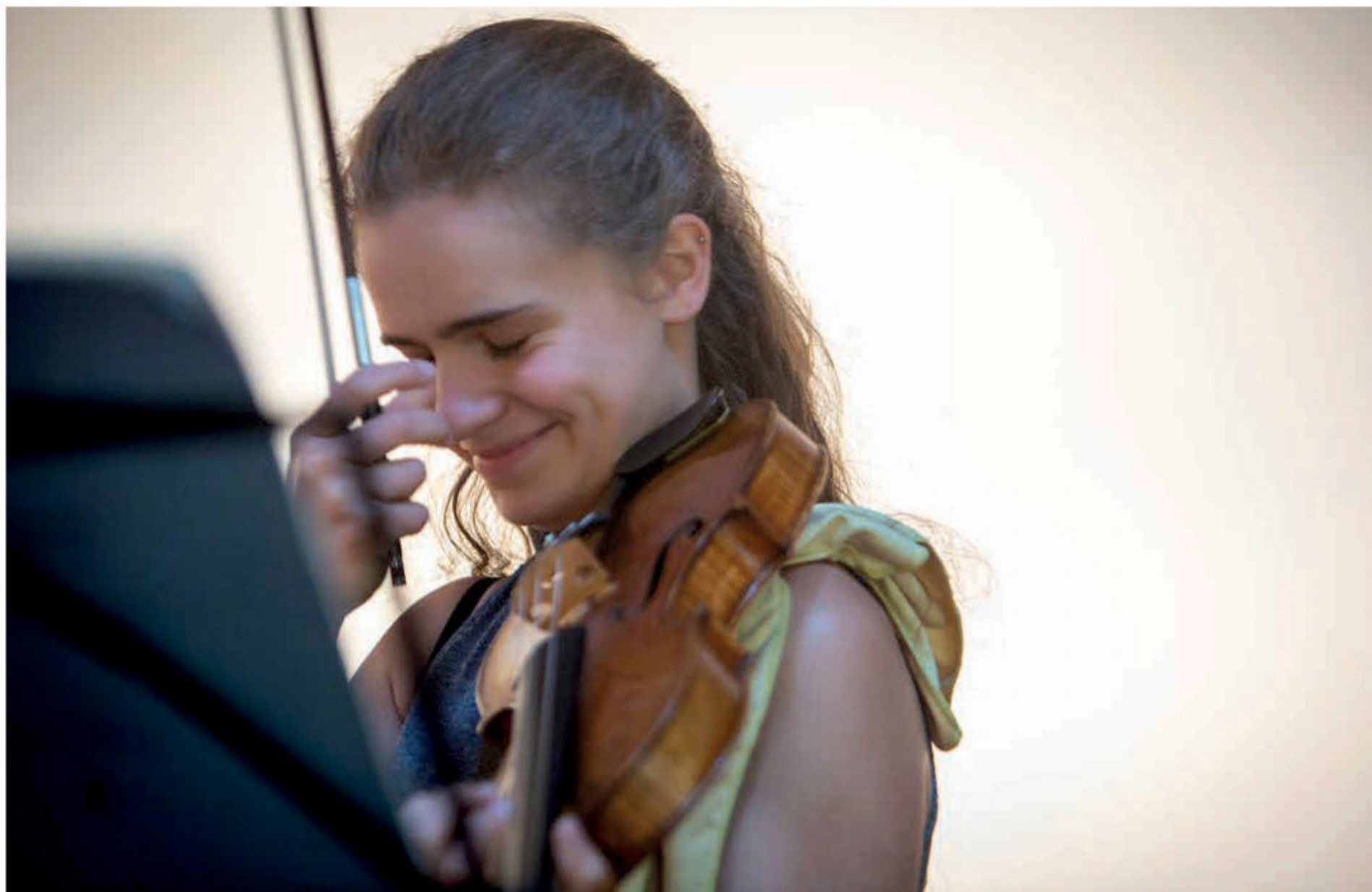


In these days of customary moans that all string players sound the same

(especially among the younger generation, where teaching often prioritises competition-friendly safety of interpretation), I should probably begin by stating that this sensitively recorded debut album from Charlotte Saluste-Bridoux presents an artist with something of her own to say, and something worth hearing. But perhaps this should be expected, given that her biography reveals her to be a pupil of the thoroughly individual multi-*Gramophone* Award-winning violinist Alina Ibragimova, and a prizewinner at the inaugural Young Classical Artists Trust (London) and Concert Artists Guild (New York) 2021 international auditions. She is also the leader of the prizewinning Quatuor Confluence, studying with former Quatuor Ébène viola player Mathieu Herzog, and a member of the dynamic 12 Ensemble.

Back to this debut album, and while the five works are all in their own ways folk-informed, technically taxing virtuoso vehicles, they are also strikingly diverse in terms of stylistic and emotional expression. What's more, they're not all the usual solo-violin customers. For instance, while I don't have a problem with young violinists tackling Bach's D minor Chaconne on a debut disc, I'm even more in favour of Saluste-Bridoux's choice of adding to the smaller number of Biber G minor Passacaglia recordings for her Baroque-era opener. Likewise, three cheers for choosing Ysaÿe's Sonata No 4 to close her the programme, for not only do its Kreisler-inspired baroque dance movements hark satisfyingly back to Biber, but it's rather less played than 'Obsession' (No 2) or 'Sunrise' (No 5). Best of all, though, preceding the Ysaÿe is Grażyna Bacewicz's distinctly lesser-heard Sonata No 2 for solo violin – a short, acerbic work cast in five emotionally direct movements played almost without a break.

As for the performances, the Biber seals the deal in seconds: the shaping she brings to its first four lilting passacaglia notes; the shading of her ornaments; her effective deployment of rubato as the variations progress; the architectural sweep of each separate line of musical thought; and the unbroken integrity of



An adventurous debut: Charlotte Saluste-Bridoux excels both musically and technically in a daring programme of solo violin works

each of those lines as she slowly builds its argument, regardless of how many are engaged in simultaneous counterpoint. Indeed, it's the intellectual and poetic accomplishment with which she handles contrapuntal complexity that I find especially mesmerising, and it extends to the ensuing Bartók and beyond.

I also enjoyed the different ways she makes her bow speak at the micro-fingers-on-frog level, the sweet directness of her tone (fabulous in the Prokofiev), and how even through the swiftest and most puckishly darting, angular or technically thorny writing, she serves up such clean articulation and changes colour on a dime: listen to her Bartók concluding *Presto* or the prolonged double-stopped scurrings of the Bacewicz. An attention-grabbing debut.

Charlotte Gardner

'Solitude'

Biber Passacaglia, 'The Guardian Angel'

Kreisler Recitativo and Scherzo-caprice, Op 6

Paganini Caprices, Op 1 - No 10; No 24

R Panufnik Hora Bessarabia **Say** Cleopatra

Sir My Dear Bessie **Snowden** Through the Fog

Ysaÿe Solo Violin Sonata, Op 27 No 6

Joo Yeon Sir *vn*

Rubicon (RCD1076 • 58')



The standout performance here was specifically commissioned for this album: *Through the Fog* by Laura Snowden. It is an eerie piece, a murderous tarantella punctuated with cobweb harmonics and Spiritual-like song (the gorgeous harmonies of which speak, perhaps unintentionally but nonetheless beautifully, to the close of Kreisler's *Scherzo-caprice*). Joo Yeon Sir's playing is subtle and capricious. The musical corners – when fury melts into strange double-stopped harmonics, for instance – are evocatively turned. The moments of spoken text are excellently executed.

The other premiere recording here, Sir's own composition *My Dear Bessie*, is intriguing. But it is not until Ysaÿe's Sonata No 6 in E that Sir's technical and artistic prowess is on full show. It's an electric performance: slick and moody in the best of ways, rhythmic and taut to its core. Her violin, particularly its middle range, glows.

Concerning the performance of Biber's Passacaglia that opens the programme, there is no reason to write home. The variation structure is navigated with little

drama or impact, the intonation is unemotional and textures are ironed out to the featureless sheen of lino. I'm desperate for cadential trills. Her meditation is too by-the-book to be believable; either way, Sir's performance doesn't touch the bleeding sadness of Rachel Podger (Channel Classics, 11/13) or the lonely, soul-baring song of Monica Huggett (ASV, 9/01). In those superior performances, solitude isn't counted in numbers but rather something evoked in the spoken breath of bow.

In all, a mixed bag. With dread to pigeonhole, I believe that Sir has found her niche, and she does it so excellently, too. More care, then, is advised if she wishes to take on the monuments of the Baroque solo violin repertoire, for these are likely to show her as greener than she actually is.

Mark Seow



Michael Berkeley

Geraint Lewis traces the career so far of this English composer whose creativity continues to emerge even as he approaches 75

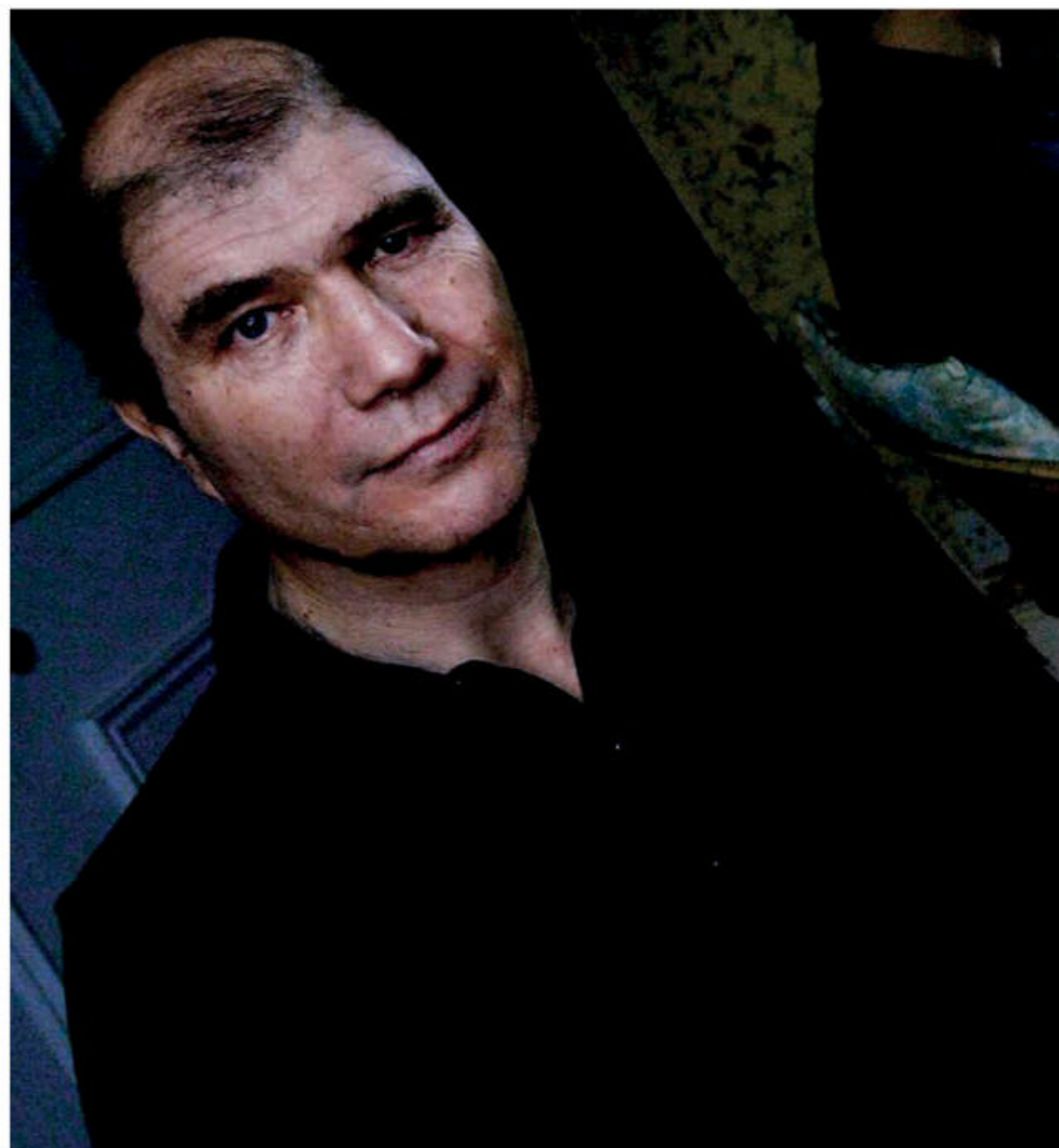
Michael Berkeley is a supremely natural communicator and his mellifluous speaking voice will have been known to millions of radio listeners over several decades. He is such a warm and sympathetic broadcaster, particularly in his award-winning BBC Radio 3 series *Private Passions*, that many who are not especially familiar with the niche-world of classical contemporary music may well have been led to explore his multifaceted compositional catalogue as a direct consequence of his persuasive public presence. From his first orchestral score, the 1975 *Meditations* for strings, to the Violin Concerto premiered at the 2016 BBC Proms, they will have discovered a wide-ranging output which, while always remaining vividly open in idiom, has nevertheless undergone several dramatic transformations over the course of its sometimes turbulent journey.

Berkeley's studio debut came in 1961 when he sang the part of a cuckoo to the piano accompaniment of his godfather Benjamin Britten in a song from *Friday Afternoons*. The soloist, John Hahessy (later Elwes), was head chorister at Westminster Cathedral and Berkeley had joined the choir at the age of eight in 1956 after his composer father Lennox heard him singing himself to sleep. Michael was fortunate that his father's

He has a diverse capacity to engage with virtually all the available musical genres

Catholicism naturally chose this particular choir at the most remarkable point in its development. George Malcolm's cultivation of a vibrant continental timbre had attracted the attention of Britten, who in 1959 wrote his *Missa brevis* for the boys. With Lennox for father and Britten as godfather, not to mention encounters with major musical personalities of the age, Berkeley would have been envied by many for his privileged background. But it should also be seen as a rather daunting inheritance which could easily have led to rejection and rebellion. Indeed, at London's Royal Academy of Music, he went his own way and joined a rock group whose name – Seeds of Discord – is telling enough.

His first major composition was *Meditations*, which reveals a musical language refulgent with plainsong patterns and echoes of 'liturgical' Honegger. It was commissioned by Colin Mawby for the Westminster Cathedral String Orchestra and won the Guinness Prize in 1977. The work made a deep impression in being unashamed to acknowledge its stylistic origins and in communicating an often passionate and emotional individual voice. Berkeley characteristically used the proceeds of the prize to continue his studies with Richard



His youthful manner and zest for life are reminiscent of Michael Tippett

Rodney Bennett, who took him back to the rigorous discipline of deriving all the music in a work from its opening germ of material. The strength of this influence can be felt immediately in the Oboe Concerto and String Trio (both 1976-77), while *Uprising* (1980) and *Flames* (1982) show the very effective application of a developing technique on a larger orchestral canvas.

The culmination of this first phase came in 1982 with the challenging oratorio *Or Shall We Die?*, on which Berkeley collaborated with the novelist Ian McEwan. In being a work 'with a message' – an impassioned protest against the proliferation of nuclear weapons – it naturally and consciously aligns itself with such anti-war masterpieces as *A Child of Our Time* and the *War Requiem*. This was Berkeley's largest work to date and received a prestigious premiere by the London Symphony Chorus and Orchestra under Richard Hickox, followed by an EMI recording with peerless soloists Heather Harper and David Wilson-Johnson. Such a high-profile platform brought Berkeley to national prominence and provided him with the impetus to broaden his expressive range in works like *For the Savage Messiah* (1985) for chamber ensemble, the Horn Concerto (1984), the Organ Concerto (1987) and *Coronach* (1988) for string orchestra, while simultaneously refining structural control.

It was the Clarinet Concerto of 1991 which dramatically began a new chapter in Berkeley's career – opera. He was writing the concerto, as well as the exotically coloured instrumental score *Entertaining Master Punch* (also 1991), as plans were being formulated for a theatrical adaptation, in collaboration with David Malouf, based on the early life of Rudyard Kipling and informed by later resonances from *The Jungle Book*. A significant liberation that Berkeley pinpointed



BERKELEY FACTS

- 1948** Born in London May 29
1956 Joins Westminster Cathedral Choir
1965 Enters the Royal Academy of Music, London
1977 Wins Guinness Prize for Composition for *Meditations*
1979 SCO Associate Composer
1983 *Or Shall We Die?* premiere: collaboration with Ian McEwan
1993 First opera: *Baa Baa Black Sheep* for Opera North
1995-2004 Artistic Director of Cheltenham Music Festival
2001-09 BBC NOW Composer-in-Association
2008 Third opera: *For You* for Music Theatre Wales
2013 Enters House of Lords as Lord Berkeley of Knighton, a crossbench working peer
2015 *Magna Carta Te Deum* for Lincoln Cathedral
2018 Prince Charles records *Private Passions* to mark his 70th birthday

in the Clarinet Concerto was the decision to compose largely away from the piano, which gave him the courage

to trust his inner ear to a greater extent. At once, a more daring and often atonal language was the result and this seemed a natural precursor of the freedom he needed to contemplate the operatic stage. *Baa Baa Black Sheep* was enthusiastically received at the 1993 Cheltenham Music Festival, where it was premiered by Opera North forces under Paul Daniel, who then went on to record it at home in Leeds.

The birth pangs of Berkeley's second opera with Malouf – *Jane Eyre* in 2000 – were, unintentionally, far more agonising: its full draft and part of the fully scored first act were stolen in a briefcase which the composer had momentarily left outside his house in London. Despite a very public campaign (and potential reward) the material was never returned or recovered and so the traumatised composer decided that the only solution was to carry on composing from where he'd left off and only after reaching the end would he return to the beginning – a process he later found to have sharpened it for the better. The result, in Music Theatre Wales's imaginative production by Michael McCarthy, was a lyrically expressed and dramatically compressed recreation or 'translation' of Charlotte Brontë's great novel whose brilliant BBC broadcast was immediately released by Chandos.

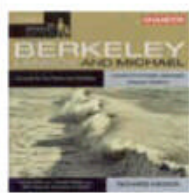
For his next Music Theatre Wales commission in 2008, Berkeley turned again to McEwan, who in *For You* formulated a fresh scenario about the tragic downfall of an egotistical composer-conductor (with an appetite for extramarital sex) who gets entangled in the deluded passion of his Polish housekeeper for whom, ironically, he has no erotic feelings. With echoes, maybe, of Kingsley Amis's 1971 novel *Girl, 20* in its drama, the score has a forensic clarity which is well captured in Signum's recording of the premiere production: it opens with a stunningly 'composed' rendition of an

orchestra tuning up and all the flair and unexpected virtuosity such moments often catch off guard.

With such a diverse capacity to engage with virtually all the musical genres available to him, Berkeley approaches his 75th birthday next year with a degree of surprise – and all those who know him will also find it hard to imagine him at that age: he retains something of Tippett's youthful appearance, manner and zest for life. But in 2014 his life was shattered by the sudden death of his wife, the literary agent Deborah Rogers, whom he married in 1979. The following year he wrote *At a Solemn Wake* for cello and piano in her memory, and some of its material went on to inspire the Violin Concerto, premiered at the Proms by Chloë Hanslip. Here the unassuaged grief of earlier works like *Fierce Tears I* and *II* (for oboe and piano; 1984, 1990) explodes into often terrifying anger, articulated with visceral impact by the use of an electronic instrument and coloured by rough jazz. It is a measure of Berkeley's musical command that catharsis and acceptance eventually emerge from violence. Having now found renewed happiness with his second wife, Elizabeth West, we can surely be prepared for further enrichment and surprise in the next phase of Berkeley's emerging creativity. A thorough revision of his 1986 soprano and chamber orchestra piece *Songs of Awakening Love* for voice and piano seems an appropriate harbinger, and a complete performance of *Insects* (2019) by Mahan Esfahani at the Aldeburgh Festival brings another ancestral chain full circle. **G**

RECORDINGS OF MICHAEL BERKELEY

A multifaceted output – from chamber music to opera



**Concerto for Orchestra, 'Seascapes'.
 Gregorian Variations**

BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Richard Hickox
 Chandos (3/07)

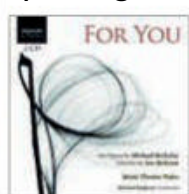
This is the last in a series pairing music by father and son. *Seascapes*, was first heard at the 2005 BBC Proms and at its heart lies 'Threnody for a Sad Trumpet', written in memory of Berkeley's friend Jane Attenborough, who drowned in the 2004 tsunami. The keening anguish and sweeping power of this work convey the sea's destructive side as well as its exhilarating energy.



'Winter Fragments'

Fleur Barron *mez* Berkeley Ensemble / Dominic Grier
 Resonus (12/18)

An impressive Hyperion LP of Berkeley's chamber music played by the Nash Ensemble (9/87) seems not to have been released as a CD so this collection from 2018 is invaluable in looking back to the evocative Clarinet Quintet (1983), the wind quintet *Catch Me if You Can* (1993) and the plangent seven-movement *Winter Fragments* (1996) for voice and ensemble. Plans are afoot to release on CD a radio recording of *Speaking Silence* (1985) by Alice Coote and Julius Drake.



For You

Alan Opie *bar* Christopher Lemmings *ten* Rachel Nicholls *sop* et al; Music Theatre Wales Ensemble / Michael Rafferty
 Signum (12/10)

Berkeley has been remarkably fortunate in that his three operas to date have been swiftly recorded by the teams involved in their premieres. In *For You*, Alan Opie is a naturally dominating presence as the overweening composer-conductor Charles Frieth whose downfall the opera traces with harrowing but realistic clarity.

Vocal



Alexandra Coghlan explores an album with Monteverdi at its heart:

'The complex web of musical influence and legacy weaves Josquin, de Rore and Rossi into a rich musical cloth' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 85**



Ivan Moody welcomes an album of meditations for choir and saxophone:

'Anyone expecting a sonic successor to The Hilliard Ensemble's work with Jan Garbarek is in for a surprise' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 87**

JS Bach

'Cantatas for Bass'

Cantatas - No 56, Ich will den Kreuzstab gerne tragen; No 82, Ich habe genug; No 158, Der Friede sei mit dir; No 203, Amore traditore
Gli Angeli Genève / Stephan MacLeod *bass*
Claves (50-3049 • 65' • T)



This is not the first time Stephan MacLeod has recorded *Ich habe genug*, nor even the second. He sang it in 2006 on a disc of Bach cantatas with Montreal Baroque under Eric Milnes (ATMA Classique, 6/07), and subsequently included it on a disc he made – as here with his own group, Gli Angeli Genève – of sacred cantatas by Bach, Buxtehude and others (Sony, 11/08). The difference, of course, is that this time it is set in the context of Bach's other two church cantatas for solo bass and orchestra, and thus the attention is drawn more firmly to MacLeod's own voice – which can be described as light, smooth and baritone-y – and to his singing style, in which soft natural lyricism and tender affection for the music take the lead over self-conscious dramatic gestures. In fact, this, along with a balance that makes him more a part of the ensemble than a dominator of it, might even cause one to doubt his wish be in the spotlight.

Still, humility is an appropriate stand in these cantatas, which deal so movingly with submission to kindly death, and perhaps it is mainly the competition offered in this trio of works by such firm and masterly interpreters as Matthias Goerne (Decca, 4/00) and Thomas Quasthoff (DG, 1/05) that makes one think that more could be made of them emotionally. So although MacLeod invites the bass-line instruments to give a little push to the first beat of the bar at the start of *Ich habe genug*, it is much less than in the ATMA recording, and while the first aria of *Ich will den Kreuzstab gerne tragen* has a suitably plangent feel to it, in the succeeding recitative, with its rocking cello line suggesting a woe-ridden

passage over the sea of life, there is little sense of fear. In short, MacLeod's readings are just a little pallid, even sulky.

Goerne and Quasthoff both sing with modern instruments, however, so if you want the period sound you could do worse than turn to this recording, which is certainly done with skill and style. There is also a bonus in the Italian secular cantata for bass and harpsichord *Amore traditore*, a rather curious, almost experimental piece of Bach, but one that really does require a more dramatic singer – and while we're at it, a harpsichord more present in the mix.

Lindsay Kemp

Barber

'The Complete Songs'

Ask me to rest^a. Au clair de la lune^b. Beggar's Song^c. Despite and Still, Op 41^a. Dover Beach, Op 3^d. Fantasy in Purple^e. Hermit Songs, Op 29^f. In the dark pinewood^g. Knoxville: Summer of 1915, Op 24^h. Love at the Door^g. Love's Cautionⁱ. Man^j. Mélodies passagères, Op 27^j. Mother I cannot mind my wheel^b. Music, when soft voices die^k. Night Wanderers^a. La nuit^b. Nuvoletta, Op 25^b. Of that so sweet imprisonment^l. Peace^k. Two Poems of the Wind^g. Serenader^c. A Slumber Song of the Madonna^b. Three Songs, Op 2^e. Three Songs, Op 10^h. Four Songs, Op 13ⁱ. Two Songs, Op 18^g. Three Songs, Op 45^k. Two Songs of Youth^c. Three Songs: The Words from Old England^e. Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening^k. Strings in the earth and air^l. There's nae lark^h. Thy Love^e. Watchers^k. Who carries corn and crown^e

^fMary Bevan, ⁱSamantha Clarke, ^jLouise Kemény,

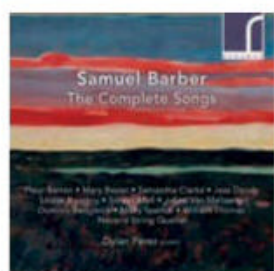
^bSoraya Mafi *sops* ^gFleur Barron *mez* ^kJess Dandy

contr ^hNicky Spence *ten* ^aDominic Sedgwick,

^{cd}Julien Van Mellaerts *bars* ^eWilliam Thomas *bass*

Dylan Perez *pf* ^dNavarra Quartet

Resonus (RES10301 ② • 159' • T/t)



Three cheers for this enterprising anthology from Resonus Classics, which adds no fewer than 19 items already published by G Schirmer to the Samuel Barber discography. Masterminded by Michigan-

born Dylan Perez (whose accompaniments throughout are a model of discretion and poise), it's an enticing voyage of discovery, with duties shared between 10 strongly characterful singers based in the UK, many of whom acquit themselves with genuine distinction – sopranos Samantha Clarke and Soraya Mafi, contralto Jess Dandy and bass William Thomas all strike me as young artists to monitor closely in the years ahead.

Disc 2 is where you'll encounter all the previously unrecorded material, among the most arresting numbers being 'Fantasy in Purple' and 'Ask me to rest' (rightly described by Perez in his engaging booklet essay as 'almost orchestral in scope'). Other gems include the eloquent 'Love's Caution', moody 'Night Wanderers' and touching 'A Slumber Song of the Madonna'. Barber's aunt, the operatic contralto Louise Homer (1871-1947), premiered and championed a goodly number of these precocious offerings, and one can easily imagine her making quite a splash with the dramatic 'Watchers' in particular. 'Thy Love' (from a sonnet by Elizabeth Barrett Browning) might almost be by Parry, and don't overlook those three powerful settings of texts from James Joyce's *Chamber Music* – 'In the dark pinewood', 'Strings in the earth and air' and 'Of that so sweet imprisonment' – that didn't make it into the composer's Three Songs, Op 10. We also get a first-class rendering of the 20-year-old's sublime treatment of Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' (sung by Barber himself while still a student at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music). Baritone Julien Van Mellaerts and the Navarra Quartet are in rapt accord here, while Nicky Spence excels in 'There's nae lark' and the deeply affecting 'Knoxville: Summer of 1915', the latter given with a piano reduction of the composer's own devising.

Moving on to disc 1, there's no denying the decidedly superior craftsmanship, literary instinct and sheer maturity already on display in the very early Three Songs, Op 2 (the limping 'Bessie Bobtail' is depicted in extraordinarily bold fashion);



Julien Van Mellaerts performs Barber's *Dover Beach* with the Navarra Quartet on an enterprising collection of the composer's songs

William Thomas does this triptych proud. Likewise, plaudits to Dominic Sedgwick and Jess Dandy for the real perception they bring to the keenly personal 'Despite and Still' and darkly subtle Op 45 songs respectively, written in the wake of the mauling of his 1966 opera *Antony and Cleopatra* (by this time, Barber's relationship with Gian Carlo Menotti was also in decline). Elsewhere, Louise Kemény is entrusted with the *Mémoires passagères* (five settings of Rainer Maria Rilke conceived for Pierre Bernac and Francis Poulenc), Nicky Spence imparts a spellbinding intensity and intelligence to the marvellous Three Songs, Op 10, while another Joyce setting, the wholly delightful, scena-like 'Nuvolleta' (to a text from *Finnegans Wake*), finds a deeply understanding and hugely personable exponent in Soraya Mafi (I love the sly nod to Wagner's *Tristan* at the words 'Tristis Tristor and Tristissimus'). What's more, Fleur Barron makes a lovely showing in the Two Songs, Op 18, as does Samantha Clarke in the enchanting 'Sure on this shining night' and glorious 'Nocturne' from the Op 13 collection. Last, but not least, Mary Bevan's performance of the disarming *Hermit Songs* (premiered in October 1953 by the great Leontyne Price) distils memorable intimacy of feeling.

Summing up, a hugely enjoyable issue to complement the *Gramophone* Award-winning DG set with Thomas Hampson,

Cheryl Studer and John Browning (DG, 5/94). Generous measure, too, and outstandingly truthful sound and balance courtesy of Adam Binks working within the helpful acoustic of Birmingham Royal Conservatoire's Bradshaw Hall. And how intriguing to learn (from David Patrick Stearns's absorbing feature in the June issue) there are plenty more songs by the teenage Barber that remain in manuscript; perhaps a future project for Perez and company? **Andrew Achenbach**

Champion

'Apostola apostolorum: A Renaissance Brotherhood Celebrates St Mary Magdalene'
Missa de Sancta Maria Magdalena
Cappella Pratensis / Stratton Bull
Challenge Classics (CC72879) • 77' • T/t)



If I praised this ensemble's last disc to the skies (8/21), it's because it brought something new to the table: the sound of polyphony improvised (or to be more precise, extemporised) on plainchant, a common occurrence at the time to which modern-day ensembles (and, to be fair, scholars too) are just latching on. If anything, this latest offering is finer still. The improvisations offered here are more complex than anything attempted on the

previous disc. That's because they are based on a few sources of the time that explicitly set down what such improvisations would have sounded like at the hands of the most skilled practitioners. Cappella Pratensis have increasingly incorporated these into their live performances: the moment of surprise when the added voices make their first appearance (at the reprise of the chant introit) really is something to experience. And there's much more of it than on the earlier disc – an entire Marian Vespers' worth after the Mass has ended.

I had found the Mass by Mouton the hardest nut to crack of all the offerings on the previous disc; not so the *Mass for St Mary Magdalene* by Nicolas Champion (c1475-1533), best known as the likelier composer of the wonderful four-voice *De profundis* ascribed to Josquin. It's a marvel of fluency and poise. The same might be said of the performance, which surpasses the 2009 account from Graindelavoix. Even devotees of the latter may come to appreciate the virtues of this 'straighter' reading, whose acoustic qualities are in no way inferior. (The reverb on Graindelavoix's account takes on a surreal quality in comparison, and the same might be said for their own chant improvisations.) If I hear anything that pleases me more all year I shall be surprised. **Fabrice Fitch**

Comparative version:

Graindelavoix, *Schmelzer*

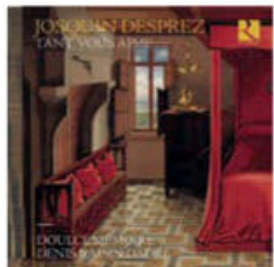
Glossa GCDP32104 (A/09)

Josquin



'Tant vous aime ...'

Anonymous Mein hercz in hohen frewden ist (Lochamer Liederbuch). Petite camusette
Attaignant Basse dance Cœur angoisseux
Capirola Ricercar ottava **Compère** Scaramella fa la galla **Isaac** Missa la Spagna – Agnus Dei
Josquin À l'heure que je vous px. À l'ombre d'ung buissonnet. Belle pour l'amour de vous. Bergerette savoysienne. El grillo. In te, Domine, speravi. Une jeune fillette (sur Comment peult avoir joye). Ma bouche rit. Petite camusette. Que vous madame/In pace. Qui belles amours. Scaramella va alla guerra. Si je perdoys mon amy/Par ung matin m'y levay. Tant vous aime. Vivrai je toujours en telle paine **Ockeghem** Ma bouche rit. S'elle m'amera/Petite camusette
Paumann An avois (Lochamer Liederbuch)
Petrucchi Bergeretta savoyena
Doulce Mémoire / Denis Raisin Dadre Ricercar (RIC436 • 64' • T/t)



Josquin has long been established as a pre-eminent *oltremontano* – a northern European composer who crossed over the mountains into Italy. Recent scholarship, however, suggests he spent much more time on his original side of the Alps than was initially thought. This new album from Doulce Mémoire – the first since their unforgettably superb 'Leonardo da Vinci: La musique secrète' (Alpha, 7/19) – largely explores songs from Josquin's French years. Furthermore, Denis Raisin Dadre has searched original folk anthologies to restore missing verses to several works, notably 'Tant vous aime'. In another instance he has matched the poem 'Une jeune fillette' to Josquin's 'Comment peult avoir joye'.

Opening with an early song, 'Si je perdoys mon amy/Par ung matin m'y levay' ('I have lost my friend/One morning I awoke'), Dadre has taken lyrics from the Bayeux manuscript. Here, as throughout this album, one is immediately charmed by the voice of Clara Coutouly, whose gently mournful first verse leads first to a duet then to full ensemble as the bittersweetness of the poem unfolds. The architecture of this track is delightful – nimble, knowing and quick-witted – and it sums up the album aptly: a charming and gripping performance that tells a story.

Among the small group of Italian songs that are represented here, I particularly enjoyed both Compère's and Josquin's settings of the popular song 'Scaramella'. The instrumental playing in Compère's version is snappy and precise, but I prefer a vocal top line such as with The Orlando Consort (Metronome, 6/94). Josquin's

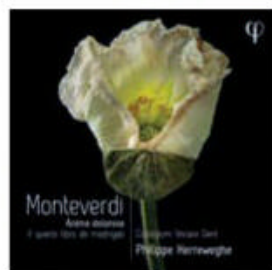
'Scaramella' is performed with a Munrow-esque verve (cf 'The Art of the Netherlands' – Erato, 11/76) but his infamous 'El grillo' ('The Cricket') I enjoyed less for its forced jollity. There's so much to explore here, especially among the French songs, and it's supported by a superbly informative note by David Fallows. This could be one of my favourite secular Josquin discs in recent years. **Edward Breen**

Monteverdi

'Anima dolorosa'

Madrigals, Book 4

Collegium Vocale Gent / Philippe Herreweghe PHI (LPH037 • 57' • T/t)



The sensual wrestle between pleasure and pain is at the core of many of the texts set

in Monteverdi's Fourth Book of Madrigals. Recordings must negotiate the same push-pull battle in their choices. Some, like Concerto Italiano's angsty, fleshy account (Naïve, 12/93), throw the fight, tipping the balance. Others play it out in real time, a back-and-forth of shifting triumphs as we hear from Paul Agnew and Les Arts Florissants (1/15). So where do Herreweghe and his Collegium Vocale land?

This is Herreweghe's second Monteverdi recording on the PHI label – a follow-up to a vivid 1610 *Vespers*, praised by *Gramophone*'s David Vickers for its 'kaleidoscopic dynamism' (10/18). But the intimate tugging dialogues of Book 4 are a world away from the monumental sacred spectacle of the *Vespers*, and Collegium Vocale Gent's signature pristine tone and pinprick precision (showcased, for good and ill, in the group's recording of Gesualdo's Book 6 Madrigals – 2/17) seem less obviously suited to the up-close musical grind, gasp and sweat of these secular works.

A luxury cast of six solo voices including sopranos Miriam Allan and Barbora Kabátková and tenor Benedict Hymas, often unobtrusively supported by Michele Pasotti's lute and chitarrone, bring us in tight, the acoustic of Ghent's Karmelietenkerk supplying the subtlest airbrushing to the luminous sound. It's very beautiful indeed. The beloved's eyes in 'Luci serene' glow and glitter, while the abandoned shepherdess of 'Piagn'e sospira' mourns in textures as softly swelling as the woolly bellies of her flock. The happier young lovers of 'Io mio son giovinetta' frolic with delicious lightness, while thoughts turning to the hope of reunion

in 'Longe da te' are mirrored in rhythms that briefly relax into the sway of dance.

But the group's silvery tone comes close to pallor at times, and after the initial stab of dissonance in the upper voices, the clasp and cling of parting in 'Ah dolente partita' feels a little cool. It's even more noticeable in 'Che se tu', whose text describes lovers so indistinguishably, absolutely intertwined that 'your tears are my blood'. Herreweghe gives the singers plenty of rhythmic freedom and space, but in terms of colour and articulation it all still feels a little business-as-usual, especially from the men – take away the words and this love song could just as easily be a Marian antiphon.

All Herreweghe's habitual care and detail are here but these are works that arguably flourish best with just a little imprecision, coming into focus at the intersection of blurred lines, seizing emotional control just as the conductor surrenders it.

Alexandra Coghlan

Rameau

'Nouvelle symphonie'

Excerpts from Acante et Céphise, Castor et Pollux, Dardanus, Les Indes galantes, La naissance d'Osiris, Les Paladins, Pygmalion and Zoroastre

Florian Sempey bar

Les Musiciens du Louvre / Marc Minkowski

Château de Versailles Spectacles (CVS062 • 65' • T/t)



I'm sure baritone soloist Florian Sempey and conductor Marc Minkowski won't

mind if I first praise the four other heroes on this disc: Jani Sunnarborg, Josep Casadella, Thomas Quinquenel and Nicolas André. These are the four bassoonists who throughout the album provide so much pleasure. Take the Overture to *Castor et Pollux* (1737) that opens this 'Nouvelle symphonie': the bassoons fizzle and growl, infecting the rest of the band with glorious rhythmic vivacity and dynamic bounce. And again, in Act 2 scene 6 of *Les Paladins* (1757), the bassoons are a burnished, tart shadow to Sempey's declamation.

Timbre is at the heart of this album's success. Gloriously shrill and out-of-tune flutes, trilling horns, strings plucking *à la guitare* with not a care in the world – the 'Entrée très gaye de troubadours' from *Les Paladins* is a hoot. The music is as capricious as a kid in a sweetshop, and it's fun just to try and keep track of its strange turns. I found myself shrieking in delight during the 'Sarabande pour la Statue' from

Pygmalion (1748), such is its timbral and episodic unpredictability.

These moments when the French theatre emerges to the fore is the album at its strongest. None more so than the Overture to *Acante et Céphise, ou La sympathie* (1751): scales in the woodwind fly across the band like paper streamers, horns gurgle in the middle of the texture. Even the brilliantly obstinate drumbeat provided by David Dewaste cannot control the commotion. The performance achieves something so difficult in instrumental music: it is funny.

The album's concept – 'Let's imagine a Rameau symphony with a voice' – does not add much, and this is no real symphony anyway. Sempey for the most part is of superb voice, though some of the low notes feel a bit beyond his resonant reach. In the aria from *Dardanus* (1739), Sempey is at first heroic. This does not last long as he turns to storytelling horror for 'Monstre affreux, monstre redoutable': through the sighingly evocative libretto, Sempey conjures a frightening scene. But with the repeat of the 'Monstre' chorus, things get psychological and it is as if the singer retreats inside himself. Is he cautious of waking the monster? Or perhaps the monster is really within? As swirling strings turn into waves, the monster beckoned to emerge from the deep, we're treated to that familiar Baroque device in which the storm is both of inner torment and exterior wind-battered chaos. Minkowski controls a fabulously exciting string section. **Mark Seow**

D Scarlatti • Avison

Avison Concerto grosso No 3 (after D Scarlatti) – Allegro **D Scarlatti** Stabat mater. Sonatas – Kk90; Kk144; Kk213. Amor d'un'Ombra e Gelosia d'un'aura – Dammi un poco ... Ma di raggione; Dio d'amor ... Arcier fatale; Sento, che a poco, a poco. O qual meco Nice cangiata – Sinfonia. Pur nel sonno almen tal'ora

Emmanuelle de Negri sop

Paul-Antoine Bénos-Djian counterten

Le Caravansérail / Bertrand Cuiller org/hpd

Harmonia Mundi (HMM90 5340 • 76' • T/t)



Domenico Scarlatti is best known for the hundreds of keyboard sonatas that he

composed during the latter part of his life for his pupil Maria Barbara, princess of Portugal and later queen of Spain. But he also wrote operas and church music. Almost all of the former are lost; the church music that survives includes this *Stabat mater*, which probably dates from his time in Rome between 1715 and 1719.

Scored for 10-part choir and continuo, it lasts for some 20 minutes. There is plenty of counterpoint – 'Fac ut animae' is fast and fugal – but Scarlatti largely eschews block harmony. Truth to tell, the piece is rather dull, but once in a while something occurs to make you sit up. There's a surprising, dramatic pause after the first line of 'Quis non posset'; and at 'Inflammatu', soprano and tenor (the booklet note oddly says alto) engage in operatic melismas. Le Caravansérail, singing one-to-a-part, are impressively sonorous, though the distinctive tones of the countertenor Paul-Antoine Bénos-Djian are rather too prominent.

The opera *Amor d'un'Ombra e Gelosia d'un'aura* (Rome, 1714) survives in the form of an adaptation by Scarlatti's friend Thomas Roseingrave performed under the title *Narciso* in 1720 at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket; it was part of the first season of operas promoted by the Royal Academy of Music. The three, or rather four numbers presented here (explanation to follow) are separated by some of the 'other works' of the disc's title. 'Sento, che a poco, a poco', a ditty lamenting 'the fire of passion', is given a lift by a twice delayed cadence at the end of the 'B' section. Emmanuelle de Negri sings with a touching simplicity. Track 20 consists of a pastoral aria sung by one character in Act 2 followed by a 'battle' aria sung by a different character in Act 3. Bénos-Djian takes the contrast in his stride, singing sweetly and vigorously respectively. He and Negri come together sublimely for 'Dio d'amor', Narcissus and Echo combining in sensuous thirds: a duet worthy of the Handel who wrote 'Io t'abbraccio' in *Rodelinda*.

Pur nel sonno almen tal'ora is a 19-minute cantata for soprano, two violins and continuo, to a text by Metastasio. A substantial instrumental introduction is followed by a Minuetto, charmingly played here by harp, archlute and pizzicato cello. A recitative – part *secco*, part *accompagnato*, with a violent intervention from the violins when the lover sees his rival – is enclosed by two *da capo* arias, the work rounded off with a powerful postlude. Negri is fiery, grippingly so.

Unlike the single-movement works for keyboard, the Sonata Kk90 is in four movements, the opening *Grave* leading to a skittish *Allegro* and two short fast movements in triple time. The violinist Leila Schayegh is supported by harp, theorbo and harpsichord; the bass line would have benefited from the addition of a cello, but it's an engaging account all the same. The Sonata Kk213, also in D minor, an *Andante* of exquisite

sensibility, is played with a fine sense of introspection by Bertrand Cuiller. The G major *Cantabile*, Kk144, labelled 'doubtful' by Grove, is assigned to the harp of Bérengère Sardin. The disc is completed by a short Sinfonia and one of Avison's concerto grosso arrangements.

All in all, this is a fine achievement by Bertrand Cuiller and Le Caravansérail, demonstrating that there's more to Scarlatti than those hundreds of keyboard sonatas. Predictable scattering of misprints in the booklet: none important, and I rather enjoyed the image conjured up by the reference to Scarlatti's 'loyal fiend Roseingrave'. **Richard Lawrence**

Schubert

'21 Songs'

Abendstern, D806. An den Mond – D259; D296. An Sylvia, D891. Auf dem Wasser zu singen, D774. Erbkönig, D328. Frühlingsglaube, D686. Ganymed, D544. Im Abendrot, D799. Im Frühling, D882. Lachen und Weinen, D777. Litanei auf das Fest Allerseelen, D343. Der Musensohn, D764. Nacht und Träume, D827. Rastlose Liebe, D138. Seligkeit D433. Ständchen, D957 No 4. Der Tod und das Mädchen, D531. Wanders Nachtlied I, 'Der du von dem Himmel bist', D224. Wanders Nachtlied II, 'Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh', D768. Der Zwerg, D771

Alice Coote mez **Julius Drake** pf

Hyperion (CDA68169 • 71' • T/t)



The challenge of any Schubert recital is translating all that is implied by his

miniature masterworks into a keyhole view of a rich though distant world. Does one assume the role of the empathetic storyteller such as Roderick Williams? Or enlarge the keyhole a bit by inhabiting the inner life of the song? Such is Alice Coote's approach in this new collection of Schubert's most loved songs that isn't out to compete with Williams, the meticulous text readings of Ian Bostridge's many Schubert recordings or the cultivated gentility of the famous Elisabeth Schwarzkopf/Edwin Fischer Schubert recital (EMI/Warner, 9/53), but is a revisionist alternative where dramatic narratives bubble underneath the simplest surfaces.

The programme is sequenced symmetrically: the 1815 version of 'An den Mond' (D259) and 'Wanders Nachtlied I' are positioned as an introduction to a series of Schubert songs from the early 'Erbkönig' to the late 'Ständchen' but circles back to 'Wanders Nachtlied II' and the 1819 version of 'An den Mond' (D296) that reflects with a more mature understanding

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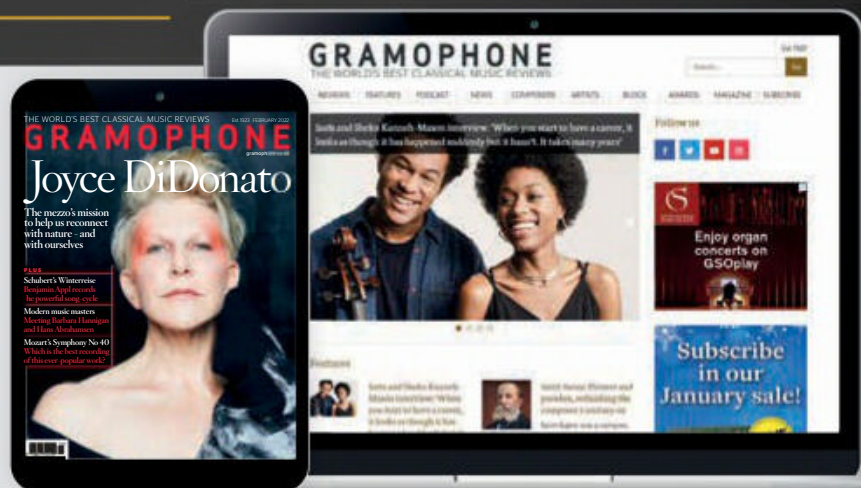


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of the tragedy of Goethe poem and includes an extra stanza that delves more poignantly into the poet's sense of loss. Early-period Schubert is sung and heard not strictly on its own terms but from the viewpoint of what the composer would become. Songs such as 'An Silvia' and 'Der Musensohn' can seem a bit twee in certain performances; with Coote, that's not possible, with her use of colour giving the songs an emotional narrative. She doesn't sugar-coat anything.

'Erlkönig' has a heart-in-mouth intensity, while the beloved 'Im Frühling' isn't sung just as a pastoral study with some dark clouds but as an inexorable slide into sorrow. Even 'Ständchen' has an underlying tension alluding to the kind of trembling that is mentioned in the final moment. Songs with multiple characters – 'Erlkönig', obviously, but also 'Der Zwerg' and even the voice of the lonely star in 'Abendstern' – are differentiated in ways that are well defined but also well judged. 'Der Tod und das Mädchen' goes quite deep and dark, the voice of death being half whispered, benevolent but not open to negotiation, the final note having an almost baritone colouring, underscored by the funeral-march pace used by pianist Julius Drake.

In all selections, he is with her all the way, with generous (though not extravagant) tempo changes and eloquent tone colours that support what she is out to convey. In strophic songs, each verse has a very distinct colour, manner and speed. One wishes that these performances were available in something more than a sound-only medium. Coote is a particularly compelling presence in recital; I want to experience the whole package.

Finally, but less fortunately, one might wonder why an album titled '21 Songs' has 50 separate tracks. Many of the songs have separate tracks for each stanza of the poem. A terrible idea. Downloads come with a nanosecond dropout between stanzas, which is especially annoying when Coote is singing a confiding *pianissimo*. And we've all dealt with platforms that load tracks out of order. With this collection, that would be a disaster. **David Patrick Stearns**

Schubert

The Fair Maid of the Mill

(Die schöne Müllerin), D795

Nicky Spence *ten* Christopher Glynn *pf*

Signum (SIGCD711 • 63' • T)



Nearly four years since Signum's release of Schubert's *Winter Journey* (5/18) and

Swan Song (11/18), we get on to the final part of this special English-language triptych masterminded by Christopher Glynn with translations by Eric Sams. And to my mind, this version of Schubert's earlier song-cycle is the most successful of the project's instalments.

The translation, as before, is often more akin to a free reworking: Sams has clearly set out to produce something that communicates clearly on its own terms and one can only admire his boldness in going, Wanderer-like, his own way. Purists might quibble, and a few lines struck me initially as a little too free: 'let the stars ... whizz and fizz like sparkling wine', our miller boy sings in 'Mine', for example, while in 'The Hunter' he tells the unwanted interloper that everyone can do without 'your hounds, your horns and your hullabaloo'. The overall effect, though, is fresh and direct, and Sams fulfils his aims in telling the story clearly for English-speaking listeners.

A lot of credit in that regard must obviously go to Nicky Spence, undoubtedly one of the most brilliantly communicative singers working today. In his hands, every word feels natural and right, and, perhaps most importantly for the project, is clearly audible. The voice is in great condition, too: fresh and forwardly placed, youthful and full of life, and, the further we get into the cycle, imbued with touching pathos.

Indeed, although Spence is now tackling heroic tenor roles in the opera house, he only occasionally lets the voice off the leash, taking care to convey the miller boy's sensitivity and vulnerability. The most memorable moments are those of hushed introspection: there's lovely delicacy to 'The Miller's Flowers', for example, and a moving sense of quiet tragedy in the final two songs, with especially beautiful legato in 'The Miller and the Brook'.

Glynn plays with subtlety throughout, underpinning the interpretation with a wealth of telling details. If you have any doubts about the idea of lieder in English, this superb performance – beautifully recorded – should win you over. **Hugo Shirley**

Vivaldi

La Senna festeggiante, RV692

Gwendoline Blondeel *sop* Lucile Richardot *mez*

Nicholas Scott *ten* Luigi De Donato *bass*

Orchestre de l'Opéra Royal / Diego Fasolis

Château de Versailles Spectacles (CVS064 • 81' • T/t)



Those who enjoy Vivaldi as a composer of brilliantly attractive vocal music while

finding his operas somewhat casual in their response to drama could do worse than spend 80 minutes in the company of *La Senna festeggiante* ('The festive Seine'). For although in every way it has the sound of an opera, it has no drama in it to speak of or worry about; as one of his three surviving serenatas (he is thought to have composed as many as 10), it was conceived as an unstaged one-off entertainment, something to please the ears but not trouble the emotions. It is not known what that occasion was, though it has been thought to be one of several glittering receptions for which serenatas were commissioned from Vivaldi in the mid-1720s by the French ambassador to Venice. Its subjects – the role played by the Seine in the greatness of France and the general wondrousness of the teenage Louis XV, articulated by three singers representing The Golden Age, Virtue and the Seine itself – seems to fit, as does the presence in the score of certain rather deliberate toe-dips into French stylings. In his booklet notes, however, Olivier Fourés – perhaps mindful of this recording's appearance on the Château de Versailles Spectacles label – plausibly suggests that it could have been written for some other patron, perhaps one actually in France.

Whatever the provenance, it is a piece that offers only delight. And it is far from being an empty vessel; Vivaldi's gleaming personality courses unmistakably through it all, exciting the mind and beguiling the ear. The often ravishing arias fit the bill rather nicely – especially the rushing, wide-reaching bass blusters for La Senna, while Virtue's feather-light, silky 'Così sol nell'aurora' has long been a favourite Vivaldi aria of mine – and there are plenty of reminders of the composer's talent for effectively expressive recitative.

The piece has been favoured on record; the three previous versions of it – under Rinaldo Alessandrini (Naïve, A/02), Robert King (Hyperion, 3/03) and Fabio Bonizzoni (Glossa, 12/12) – have all served it well, with nothing much to help choose between them except perhaps individual singer preferences, though maybe Alessandrini's is marginally the most dramatic. This new one makes a choice no easier. It was recorded at two performances in the Opéra Royal at Versailles in February 2021 and, though there seems to have been no audience, has the keen feel of a live occasion to it. Diego Fasolis conducts with his usual energetic detail, the sound is bright and present, with two theorbos lending a pleasant ring, and everyone seems to be fired up and on their game. Gwendoline Blondeel is luminous and brilliant as The Golden Age, Lucile Richardot's Virtue is

dark and stoically focused, and Luigi De Donato impresses as La Senna, relishing the depth of his low notes if losing a little precision on the high ones. There is the odd slight orchestral untidiness here and there but not nearly enough to stop this recording from conveying all the carefree joy and beauty it should. **Lindsay Kemp**

'Battle Cry - She Speaks'

Eccles Restless in thought **Kapsberger**

Preludio V **Monteverdi** Lamento d'Arianna

O Park Battle Cry **Purcell** Bonduca - O lead me to some peaceful gloom. Dido and Aeneas -

Dido's Lament. An Evening Hymn, Z193 **Strozzi**

L'Eraclito amoroso, Op 2 No 14. La travagliata,

Op 2 No 11 **Visée** Prélude. Sarabande

Helen Charlston *mez* **Toby Carr** *theorbo*

Delphian (DCD34283 • 57' • T/t)



'Battle Cry' – it's an arresting title for an equally arresting album, the solo recital

debut from mezzo Helen Charlston. She's joined by regular collaborator Toby Carr, whose theorbo supplies the textural bridge across centuries, connecting the likes of Monteverdi, Purcell and Strozzi to a new song-cycle by Owain Park. As for the battle cry of the title, it comes in female form. The recording offers a response – a roar, a lament, a hope – for all the women whose abandoned, betrayed and too often dead bodies are strewn through the history of opera and song. Philomela is here, Dido, Ariadne, but also warrior-queen Boudicca and poet Sappho.

These characters come alive in Charlston's flexible mezzo, surely one of the most exciting voices in the new generation of British singers. The intelligence of the programming is matched in that of her delivery – legatos always reaching beyond the individual phrase for the horizon, articulation that pulls us up short, swift shifts of tone and colour that catch the mercurial play of musical light through Strozzi's monologues or the battling emotions of Monteverdi's Arianna.

There's an androgynous quality to Charlston's tone that allows her to play with and against expectations of gender: sternly dignified in Purcell's 'O lead me to some peaceful gloom', all queenly poise in Dido's Lament, softening into sensuality in the swaying rhythms and flexible phrases of Strozzi's *L'Eraclito amoroso* before taking us to the brink of disintegration in the final two of Park's songs.

Giving its title to the album, this new cycle setting texts by Georgia Way is both an

answer to the Baroque repertoire and an opening gambit. Can songs for theorbo and voice offer something to a new century? Park starts by looking to the past, nodding to Purcell and Strozzi's circling ground basses in 'Boudicca' while the voice leaps, clashes and thrusts: a baroque song that has warped over time into something bolder, stranger. Free-form verses and a folk song-like refrain catch the collision of innocence and traumatic self-discovery in 'Philomela in the Forest', while in 'A Singer's Ode to Sappho' the theorbo falls away altogether, letting the voice dart and pace and roam on its own terms. It's a striking piece of musical theatre.

Throughout, Carr's theorbo is an expressive partner for Charlston – a graceful foil in solos by Kapsberger and de Visée, a springboard and conspirator in the songs. It's an instinctive partnership, one to follow in the future. You get the strong sense from this superb recording that they're only just getting started. **Alexandra Coghlan**

'Farewells'

Baird Four Love Sonnets **Czyż** Farewells

Karłowicz Czasem gdy długo na pół sennie

marzę (Sometimes, when I spend a long time dreaming). Six Songs, Op 1 - No 1, Smutną jest

dusza moja (My soul is sorrowful unto death);

No 2, Skąd pierwsze gwiazd (Where the first

stars light up the heavens). Ten Songs, Op 3 -

No 1, Mów do mnie jeszcze (Speak to me still);

No 2, Z Erotyków (From the Love Poems); No 4,

Na spokojnym, ciemnym morzu (Upon the calm,

dark ocean); No 5, Śpi w blaskach nocy morska

toń (The ocean depths are slumbering); No 6,

Przed nocą wieczną (Before the eternal night);

No 7, Nie płacz nade mną (Don't cry over me);

No 8, W wieczorną ciszę (In the evening

stillness); No 9, Po szerokim, po szerokim

morzu (A ship with a broken anchor); No 10,

Zaczarowana królewna (An enchanted princess)

Łukaszewski Jesień (Autumn) **Moniuszko** Łza

(Tear). **Prząśniczka** (The Girls) **Szymanowski**

Kurpian Songs, Op 58 - Book 1

Jakub Józef Orliński *countertenor* **Michał Biel** *pf*

Warner Classics (9029 62697-0 • 57' • T/t)



Many surprises here, starting with Jakub Józef Orliński appearing on the

album cover looking thoroughly adult and fully clothed (no bare shoulders on this one). In his programme of Polish art songs, Szymanowski is the most familiar composer, though poets Pushkin, Shakespeare and Heine are represented in Polish translation. The total package has qualities of a parallel universe: the piano-writing recalls Romantics from Schubert

to Liszt though with gestures and vocal lines that don't follow the usual contours. Even the folk text-settings by Szymanowski are full of emotional and thus musical complications not heard even in Mahler's *Wunderhorn* period. Amid all of this, Orliński's low-vibrato straight tone lends an emotional directness to the music's brand of introspection.

Such directness is warranted in the anguished outcries of the three Pushkin settings by Henryk Czyż (1923-2003) that set the tone for the recital's title, 'Farewells'. The music feels like something out of Pushkin's own time and the 19th-century Romantics that immediately followed him, with rich harmonies, short repetitive motifs and meaningful pauses that show the poet addressing the beloved in no uncertain terms. The final song breaks off inconclusively, as if the weight of the emotion can't be expressed in words or sound. The Shakespeare sonnets set by Tadeusz Baird (1928-81) inspire such a range of responses that the songs seem more like miniature scenas, each its own world: Sonnet 56 ('Sweet love, renew thy force') with an effective network of recurring motifs, Sonnet 97 ('How like a winter hath my absence been') with chillingly spare accompaniment and Sonnet 91 ('Some glory in their birth') with strophic symmetry appropriate to the text's recurring patterns.

The major discovery here is 'Jesień' ('Autumn') by Paweł Łukaszewski (b1968). The piano-writing has haunting recurring bass notes, cimbalom-like treble plus vocal lines both sung and hummed in what amounts to a miniature tone poem. Here and throughout the disc Orliński is attuned to the text- and word-painting in the music, avian imagery especially, all showcased with special acoustic warmth. Limitations, though, become apparent in songs by Mieczysław Karłowicz that tend to go for the bare-bones essence of the poem – no window-dressing or scene-setting. Here one realises that Orliński's voice is wired to create a clean melodic line rather than more word-based conversational phrasing. The sameness in the songs reveals the sameness in Orliński's attacks and overall vocal colour. Studio-itis is also evident in pianist Michał Biel's meticulousness over poetic tension.

The recital more happily concludes with the Schubert/Schumann throwback in selections by Stanisław Moniuszko, especially 'Prząśniczka' ('The Girls'), which describes a women's spinning factory with piano-writing reminiscent of Schubert's 'Gretchen am Spinnrade'. The relatively short 57-minute length is actually just right. **David Patrick Stearns**



Nicky Spence records Eric Sams's English translation of Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* with pianist Christopher Glynn – see review on page 83

'Master & Pupil'

'Exploring the Influences and Legacy of Claudio Monteverdi'

A Gabrieli Intonazione quinto tono **G Gabrieli** Maria virgo a 10 **Ingegneri** Cantate et psallite **Josquin** Recordare virgo mater **Monteverdi** Scherzi musicali – Balletto: De la bellezza; Damigella tutta bella; Dixit Dominus; Lidia spina **Mouton** Qui ne regrettoit le gentil Févin **Rigatti** Messa e psalmi – Sinfonia; Kyrie; Gloria **Rore** O Sonno **Rossi** Sinfonia grave. Sonata duodecima sopra la Bergamasca **Wert** Tirsi morir volea **Sestina Music / Mark Chambers** Inventa (INV1007 • 71' • T/t)



The Belfast-based vocal ensemble Sestina was founded by Mark Chambers in 2011. A decade later they have released their debut recording. 'Master & Pupil' is a musical roam across Europe spanning some two centuries from 1470 to 1650. At the centre of the musical map is Claudio Monteverdi – the hub from which all the various musical roads converge and emerge. The complex web of musical influence and legacy is the guiding principle that weaves Josquin motets, Cipriano de Rore madrigals and Salamone Rossi's lively, brink-of-Baroque sonatas into a rich musical cloth.

Sestina's voices are joined by a crack team of musicians, and it's the instrumental

numbers that leap out first: the wonderfully dusky blend of woodwind in Rossi's *Sinfonia grave*, cornettos picking out bright lines against the foggy depth of dulcian and sackbuts, and the fruity ground bass and frisking ornamentation in the composer's *Sonata duodecima sopra la Bergamasca*; the soft curlicues of solo strings in Monteverdi's *De la bellezza*, melting and dissolving into the voices; the gilded Venetian glow of the opening Sinfonia to Giovanni Rigatti's eight-voice Mass. The latter is just one of plenty of surprises – works you find yourself making a note to follow up. The lesser-travelled musical roads here do much more than just emphasise the solidity of the highways.

The voices themselves are always graceful, tasteful – perhaps to a fault. Their neat, pretty sound works well for the blanched purity of Mouton's motet-homage to his teacher Antoine de Févin, *Qui ne regrettoit*, and the delicacy of Josquin's upper-voices *Recordare virgo mater*. Instrumental doubling coaxes slightly more body out of them in Monteverdi's vibrant *Dixit Dominus* and Giovanni Gabrieli's 10-part *Maria virgo*.

But if you didn't know the erotic charge of the text of Giaches de Wert's *Tirsi morir volea* (in which imagery of death and 'little death' rub suggestively up against one another), would you ever know it from this polite performance? I'm not sure. It's a similar story with much of the secular repertoire, which gives us pearl but no sonic grit. **Alexandra Coghlan**

'Phrases'

Aperghis Récitations 3, 8, 9 & 11 **Frances-Hoad** Something More Than Mortal **Leith** yhyhyhyh^a **Mitchener** whetdreem^b **Muhly** Benedicite Recitation^c **J Stephenson** Comme l'espoir/you might all disappear^d **Werner** Confessional. Like Words^e. Mixed Phrases^f. Unspecified Intentions **Werner/Martlew** Syncopate **Héloïse Werner** sop with **Daniel Shao** fl ^e**Amy Harman** bn ^f**Lawrence Power** vn/va ^a**Colin Alexander** vc ^d**Laura Snowden** gtr ^b**Calum Huggan** perc Delphian (DCD34269 • 68' • T)



It is hard not to be in awe of Héloïse Werner: a soprano of extraordinary

range, tone and vocal abilities, possessing a seemingly inexhaustible expressive range, whether singing, speaking or – as in Elaine Mitchener's curious, nightmarish, baffling *whetdreem* – sighing, moaning, and is that snoring at one point? She is no mean vocal actress, either, as her rendition of Cheryl Frances-Hoad's *Something More Than Mortal*, based on fragments from Ada Lovelace's letters, attests. The comparisons with Cathy Berberian and Meredith Monk quoted in Delphian's booklet are no exaggeration; there is something of Jane Manning, too, in her astonishing facility for contemporary music – unsurprisingly, as

Werner is a composer and arranger of subtle imagination. Oh, and did I mention that she is a cellist as well?

Her instrumental acumen is only evident using the cello as a percussion accompaniment in the vibrant *Syncopate* (composed with cellist Zoë Martlew), one of two brief extracts from her solo opera *The Other Side of the Sea* (the other track is *Confessional*, where she plays a crotale). In both pieces, wordplay – whether sung, spoken or half-sung – is the crucial element of the musical effect. So, too, in the four *Récitations* by Georges Aperghis, from the set of 14 for solo female voice (1978). No 3 is purely verbal (alas, none of the texts for the *Récitations* are included in the booklet), No 8 an ostinato between repetitive spoken patterns and sung notes, features reversed in No 9 and explored further in No 11. The effect is mesmerising if exhausting.

If Aperghis moves to the edge of music – Mitchener, arguably, beyond it – elsewhere there are less unconventional measures of Werner's interpretative range, from the euphonious – Josephine Stephenson's *Comme l'espoir/you might all disappear* (beautifully accompanied by guitarist Laura Snowden) and Nico Muhly's *Benedicite Recitation* (Daniel Shao the sensitive accompanying flautist), to Oliver Leith's discomfiting and somewhat dreary study in repetition, *yhyhyhyhyh*. It is Werner's own pieces that I will come back to most often, though: *Mixed Phrases*, *Unspecified Intentions* and especially the opening track for voice and bassoon, *Like Words*, with the terrific Amy Harman as her partner. It sounds like a medieval chanson the identity of which, maddeningly, remains just out of reach. Delphian's sound is first-rate, catching the full dynamic range and every nuance of Werner's voice. **Guy Rickards**

'This Be Her Verse'

N Boulanger Cantique. Élégie. La mer est plus belle. Prière **R Clarke** Cradle Song. Down by the Salley Gardens. The Seal Man. The Tiger **E Mayer** Abendstern. Du bist wie eine Blume. Erlkönig **C Schumann** Am Strande. Liebst du um Schönheit. Lorelei. Warum willst du and're fragen **Tagg** This Be Her Verse **Golda Schultz** sop **Jonathan Ware** pf Alpha (ALPHA799 • 59' • T/t)



In her debut solo recital recording, South African soprano Golda Schultz emerges as a master storyteller, an enterprising programmer and, most important, a lustrous Mozart/Strauss soprano. Though

the disc's all-female-composer concept is increasingly common these days, Schultz's starting point is the question, according to the booklet notes, 'what if a woman told her own story?' Thus one's ears are attuned to what – in this cross section of songs from the mid-19th century to the present – women say in music that men don't, even if the poets they choose happen to be men.

The most ready comparisons are songs by female composers based on poems and legends that are well known in male-authored versions. Discussion of differences could fill dissertations. But if I may risk cursory observations based on the composers represented here, one hears something more cogent and unified in the 'Liebst du um Schönheit' of Clara Schumann, in contrast to Mahler's more contemplative setting. A matter of gender? The general culture of each composer's respective era? A bit of both?

The subject of parenthood is another point of comparison. For Emilie Mayer, the child-stealing fairy in 'Erlkönig' is a bigger, more seductive presence than in Schubert's more plot-driven version, and is more chilling because the listener feels much greater identification with the boy being abducted. The 'Cradle Song' of Rebecca Clarke, with words by William Blake, also has exceptional child empathy, especially in the closing moments when a piano flourish departs into a different key – to dreamland, of course. More and more, Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979) is emerging as an extraordinary compositional figure before she devoted herself to pedagogy, particularly in 'Cantique', where she captures a subtle but eloquent mixture of detachment in Maurice Maeterlinck's text about how love-induced tears are never for nought.

The album takes its title, 'This Be Her Verse', from the concluding song-cycle by South African composer Kathleen Tagg (b1977), a multitalented artist who with poet Lila Palmer (b1986) makes a fierce contribution to the art-song repertoire. In the opening song, 'After Philip Larkin', Tagg makes haunting use of pithy, repetitive motifs and extended piano techniques, poetically rendered by Jonathan Ware. The rest of the cycle gives a refracted, almost cubist view of the subjects at hand, told in half-completed thoughts and in a dizzying array of impressions, concluding with Schultz singing an intense high A that will not be soon forgotten. That's one of the great aspects of the Schultz voice: in addition to her instinctual projection of words and eloquent phrase-shaping, her vocal colour morphs seamlessly from one register to another, each more alluring than the last. **David Patrick Stearns**

'Trennung'

'Songs of Separation'

Fleischer An den Schlaf. Das Clavier

Haydn Antwort auf die Frage eines Mädchens, HobXXVIa:46. Arianna a Naxos, HobXXVIb:2. Das Leben ist ein Traum, HobXXVIa:21. Die Verlassene, HobXXVIa:5 **Herbing** Montan und Lalage: Eine Erzählung **Mozart** Abendempfindung, K523. Als Luise die Briefe ihres ungetreuen Liebhabers verbrannte, K520. An Chloe, K524. Das Lied der Trennung, K519 **Wolff** An das Clavier

Carolyn Sampson sop **Kristian Bezuidenhout** fp BIS (BIS2623 • 73' • T/t)



With a mixture of composers both beloved and utterly obscure, Carolyn

Sampson and Kristian Bezuidenhout elect to start their often distinguished disc of 18th-century vocal music with a piece whose lack of musical significance is so puzzling as to be intriguing. 'Montan und Lalage' by August Bernhard Valentin Herbing (1735-66) is almost nothing but musical oration in its ballad-style telling of a story of lost-at-sea lovers. Though full of dramatic variety in its cantata-like form, this lyricism-challenged 12-minute piece turns out to be a somewhat elucidating ancestor to what ends the disc, Haydn's similarly scaled but more substantial *Arianna a Naxos*.

Herbing also provides a showcase for the programme's performance strategy by Sampson and Bezuidenhout. Never do they oversell the infrequently heard art songs by Haydn and Mozart that, unsurprisingly, turn out to be the disc's main attractions. Bezuidenhout uses an unimposing fortepiano by Paul McNulty after an 1805 Viennese model by Anton Walter & Sohn whose main expressive option is flexible tempos, which Bezuidenhout employs with such attention to the words that strophic songs never seem repetitive. With support of that calibre, Sampson scales back her tone in the interest of projecting words first and foremost. Vibrato is used for rhetorical emphasis more than for decoration or projection. Using these tools, she presents every song as being delivered by a well-drawn protagonist, and emerges as a master storyteller in one of her more emotionally direct performances on disc. She sings about Herbing's characters Montan and Lalage as if they're old friends – and as if she is personally talking to you.

Such qualities are particularly apparent when comparing Sampson's Haydn *Arianna* next to Jessye Norman's (from the album 'Jessye Norman Live' – Decca, 6/89). Both make the piece work on their



Soprano Héloïse Werner recording her album 'Phrases' with guitarist Laura Snowden - see review on page 85

own terms, though I stand back and marvel at Norman's outpouring of vocal colour, while Sampson draws me into the story. Oddly, Bezuidenhout's fortepiano conditions one's ears in ways that make the modern piano accompanying Norman (the distinguished Geoffrey Parsons) sound unconvincingly bloated.

By the end of this 'Songs of Separation' disc, the lesser-known composers such as Friedrich Gottlob Fleischer (1722-1806) and Christian Michael Wolff (1707-89) have been a worthwhile listen, especially when Bezuidenhout pairs two like-minded tributes to the clavichord, 'Das Clavier' and 'An das Clavier' respectively. The generous keyboard-writing, eager word-painting and fascinating chromaticism in the Wolff makes his song the one I most want to hear again. In any case, the lesser works show how Haydn and Mozart shaped and elevated the standard musical and rhetorical techniques of the era, illustrating the difference between a popular art and a potentially timeless one. **David Patrick Stearns**

'When Sleep Comes'

'Evening Meditations for Voices & Saxophone'
Anonymous Psalm 121. Te lucis ante terminum
Brumel Lamentations **Forshaw** In paradisum.
Renouncement **Gibbons** Drop, drop slow

tears **Hildegard of Bingen** O vos imitatores
Lyte/Monk Abide with me **O Park** Night Prayer
Tallis O nata lux. Sancte Deus. Te lucis ante
terminum **Victoria** Reproaches
Christian Forshaw sax **Tenebrae** / **Nigel Short**
Signum (SIGCD708 • 63' • T/t)



'It's been done before', you may say. Well, yes and no. The first thing Nigel Short does

in his introduction to the recording is to mention the fact that it has predecessors; but anyone expecting a sonic successor to The Hilliard Ensemble's work with Jan Garbarek is in for a surprise. There is more than one reason for this. One is that Christian Forshaw's sound is very different from that of Garbarek, though this is of course impossible really to put into words. Then the actual musical nature of the saxophone's interventions is very different, and this has to do with the working process of the creation of the disc, which draws upon Forshaw's experience as a choir singer himself and his knowledge of the repertoire, and also results from the fact of Forshaw's own pieces being originally conceived, even if they are

built on other composers' music, for this combination.

Something that struck me very forcibly with The Hilliards' 'Officium' (ECM, 10/94) was the extraordinary sense of relief when one hears Morales's *Parce mihi* for the second time, and there is no saxophone! This also does not obtain here, since the balance of a *cappella* ensemble and ensemble-plus-sax has been calibrated in such a way that the ear does not tire. Forshaw is highly adept at thinking himself into the musical material he works with – the chant-based *Te lucis ante terminum* is a fine example, the saxophone emerging out of the melody as though it were another voice, and then, by turns, soaring above or performing as part of the ensemble texture. In *O nata lux de lumine*, Forshaw has the wisdom to employ maximum discretion in his interventions in the central section, which quotes the Tallis complete. It would have been utterly self-defeating to add another permanently present voice to Tallis's already complex harmonic thinking.

This thought-provoking and beautifully recorded disc ends with a magnificent rendition of Brumel's austere but deeply affecting *Lamentations* (without saxophone). Less, as somebody has said, is indeed more.
Ivan Moody

ONLINE CONCERTS & EVENTS

Mark Pullinger explores a range of web-based song and opera



Lots of lieder in Leeds

Each year the spotlight on art song shines over **Leeds Lieder**, a festival that has grown in stature and international appeal since it turned into an annual event. ‘Song Illuminated’ was the title of this year’s programme and indefatigable festival director Joseph Middleton once again put together an impressive roster of performers. The four days were packed with lunchtime and evening recitals, masterclasses, study events and pre-concert talks – Richard Stokes is fascinating on Wolf’s *Mignon Lieder* – all of them streamed live on YouTube and available on demand.

You’ll have a harder heart than mine not to be in floods of tears

Schubert lies naturally at the heart of any lieder festival and there was plenty on offer here. There were two all-Schubert recitals, centred around *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Schwanengesang*. Ashley Riches makes a strong impression in the former in his lunchtime recital. The bass-baritone has real stage presence these days and lived every song, with fine dynamic variation – from whisper to roar – and expression. Middleton’s playing is superb, especially the dramatic portrayal of the mill churning away in ‘Am Feierabend’.

Ian Bostridge’s tenor has retained its remarkable clarity and ease, and he invests *Schwanengesang* with his trademark intelligence. Some viewers may find his performance exaggerated with its over-emphatic consonants and bending of notes; he certainly doesn’t hold back in epic songs such as ‘Der Atlas’. He is joined by that most sensitive Schubertian, Imogen Cooper, who is responsive to Bostridge’s every nuance. Bostridge does not always make for comfortable listening, but then this isn’t comfortable repertoire.

Two sopranos stood out in this year’s festival. Dorothea Röschmann opened the

festival with an accomplished programme. Schumann’s *Gedichte der Königin Maria Stuart* is full of pathos and dignity, while her Wolf *Mignon Lieder* and a selection from Mahler’s *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* are wonderfully animated. Röschmann’s soprano no longer has its dewy freshness but it is full of character. She closes with a committed account of Wagner’s *Wesendonck Lieder*.

Another German soprano, Nikola Hillebrand, closed the festival, replacing Louise Alder at very short notice to make her UK recital debut (having sung Barbarina in Glyndebourne’s *Figaro* in 2016). Her Schubert and Brahms are accomplished but it’s her dozen Strauss songs after the interval that really catch the ear. Hillebrand’s radiant, gilt tone fits this repertoire lusciously, her diction is excellent and she communicates warmth. You’ll be a puddle by the end of ‘Morgen!’. There are no on-screen subtitles but texts and translations are available to download from the Leeds Lieder website.

A WAGNERIAN DOUBLE

There’s plenty of Wagner available to stream at present. Hungarian State Opera has a new *Parsifal* (OperaVision) and German broadcaster ARD has Stefan Herheim’s new *Ring* cycle from the Deutsche Oper Berlin. My Wagnerian wanderings saw me drop anchor in the Rhine for Roger Vontobel’s staging of **The Flying Dutchman** at the Nationaltheater Mannheim. Fabian Wendling’s set is cleverly constructed from ropes to create the illusion of a ship, a spider’s web, a prison and even a loom during the Spinning Chorus.

Vontobel has dancer doubles for the Dutchman and Senta so that, for example, in the Dutchman’s great monologue ‘Die Frist ist um’, bass-baritone Michael Kupfer-Radecky’s expressions of torment are translated into dance by Michael Bronczkowski, who writhes and gestures

his restlessness. We see his ‘dream Dutchman’ dance with ‘dream Senta’ during her Ballad, and when the Dutchman sets sail and rises to the skies, it’s Senta’s double who follows on a fly-wire. It’s a device that doesn’t jar with the story but enhances it in a truly moving way.

Daniela Köhler’s laser-like soprano is perhaps more suited to Brünnhilde than to Senta but she sings fearlessly. Kupfer-Radecky is a terrific Dutchman, strongly projected and properly brooding. Sung Ha looks impossibly young to be singing Daland but his supple bass sounds gorgeous, while Jonathan Stoughton is an earnest Erik. Jordan de Souza draws a cracking performance from the Nationaltheater’s orchestra and chorus in this highly recommendable relay from the Rhineland.

Still metaphorically in the Rhine, we travel to Rotterdam, where the Philharmonic’s former principal conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin took the helm for a marvellous concert performance of **Das Rheingold**. There are no music stands and no ‘concert staging’, although the singers’ reactions are suitably dramatic. Samuel Youn’s Alberich is dark and menacing, if occasionally wandering from the written note, and I love how Jamie Barton intervenes to protect Christiane Karg’s Freia by squaring up to the giants, only to find herself completely dwarfed by Stephen Milling’s towering Fasolt.

Nézet-Séguin is a bundle of energy and gets distinguished playing from the Rotterdam Philharmonic, apart from a messy exit from Nibelheim by the offstage anvils. Michael Volle is a careworn Wotan, his baritone quite frayed in places now, but he’s probably – along with Gerhard Siegel’s wily Loge – the most experienced of the cast in his role and it tells. Barton’s Fricka is rich and fierce, Karg is a pearly Freia and Milling and Mikhail Petrenko make a growly pair of giants. There is a strong trio of Rhinemaidens, led by Erika Baikoff’s fine Woglinde.



The Flying Dutchman from Mannheim: Michael Bronczkowski's dancing 'dream Dutchman' complements Michael Kupfer-Radecky brooding performance as the Dutchman

A PUCCINI TRIPTYCH

After all that German fare, time for some Italian opera ... albeit with a German director. I was lucky enough to see Tobias Kratzer's new production of Puccini's **Il trittico** at La Monnaie, Brussels, in March, but was thrilled to watch it again via streaming. It's a production based on visual media, and although Puccini's three operas stand independently, Kratzer draws links between them all. *Il tabarro*, the Grand Guignol slice of Parisian life on the Seine, is presented as a graphic novel, a two-tier set split into story frames. While Giorgetta and Luigi slip into an illicit embrace above decks, barge-owner Michele watches a sitcom on the television: *Gianni Schicchi*!

In *Suor Angelica*, a huge video wall shows black-and-white footage of life in the convent, including a couple of nuns sneaking a peek at the *Tabarro* graphic novel in their pews. Rather than distracting from the tragic tale of Angelica, who discovers that her illegitimate son has died, it amplifies it, showing each nun battling with her own fears and torments. During Angelica's death throes – a suicide through

taking poison – we watch the confiscated copy of *Tabarro* thrown into the fireplace by the Abbess ... only for a spark to catch the carpet, fire quickly engulfing the entire convent. Through the flames, Angelica sees a vision of her son, and you'll have a harder heart than mine not to be in floods of tears.

For *Gianni Schicchi*, locals were invited to watch the opera from the stage, a 'studio audience' for a sitcom. Buoso Donati slips on an LP – it is *Suor Angelica*! – and decides to rewrite his will, only to collapse moments after signing it. Cue the grasping relatives – led by the comic genius that is Elena Zilio (82) as Zita – and a really funny staging that ends up with most of the cast stripping off and clambering into a huge bubble bath.

Lianna Haroutounian is better as an affecting Angelica than as the flirtatious Giorgetta (I saw the outstanding Corinne Winters sing both roles on my visit) and it is refreshing to see Luigi sung by a young tenor (he is supposed to be 20), the bright-toned Adam Smith, who also sings Rinuccio in *Schicchi*, as indeed did Giulio Crimi, who sang both in the world

premiere at the Metropolitan Opera in 1918. Hungarian bass-baritone Péter Kálmán does a sterling job as a dark and vengeful Michele, then turns on his comic heels as the bumptious Schicchi. Among the strong supporting cast, Raehann Bryce-Davis is a chic Zia Principessa, in voluptuous voice, and Benedetta Torre charms as Lauretta. Ouri Bronchti replaced Alain Altinoglu (Covid) at short notice and the playing of the Monnaie Symphony Orchestra is superb, making one marvel again at the rich invention in Puccini's scoring. **G**

THE EVENTS

Leeds Lieder

[youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

Wagner Der fliegende Holländer
Mannheim National Theatre

[operavision.eu](https://www.operavision.eu)

Wagner Das Rheingold
Rotterdam PO / Nézet-Séguin
[medici.tv](https://www.medic.tv)

Puccini Il trittico
La Monnaie, Brussels
[arte.tv](https://www.arte.tv)

Opera



Tim Ashley on Saint-Saëns's rarely heard historical opera *Henry VIII*:
'Michael Chioldi gives us a wonderfully sung, complex portrait of an experienced politician in the grip of desire' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 93**



Hugo Shirley watches Graham Vick's thought-provoking take on *Parsifal*:
'This critique of religious intolerance concludes in offering redemption on a straightforwardly human level' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 94**

Holliger

Lunea

Christian Gerhaher *bar*..... Nikolaus Lenau

Juliane Banse *sop*..... Sophie von Löwenthal/Mother

Ivan Ludlow *bar*..... Anton Xaver Schurz/Georg Reinbeck

..... Marie Behrends/Karoline Unger

Sarah Maria Sun *sop*.....

..... Therese Schurz/Berthe Hauer/Emilie Reinbeck

Annette Schön Müller *sop*.....

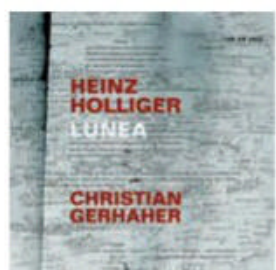
Basel Madrigalists; Philharmonia Zürich /

Heinz Holliger

ECM New Series (485 6322 ② • 102')

Recorded live at Zurich Opera House, March 2018

Includes synopsis and German libretto



Modernist opera has a thing for men suffering psychological breakdown. Alongside

Berg's *Wozzeck*, a recent go-to has been the schizophrenic outsider artist Adolf Wölfl (the subject of operas by Haas, Nørgård and Gösta Neuwirth). Madness is a useful vehicle for the post-tonal idiom, and it's also a dark romance with which, for better or worse, lots of male artists identify.

Recently another opera arrived in this line: Heinz Holliger's *Lunea*, recounting the last days of the German Romantic poet Nikolaus Lenau. Lenau's life story is a time-honoured one: bourgeois-born, educated in law but a poet by vocation, stricken with syphilis, dead in a lunatic asylum. As with Hölderlin, it's the tragedy of a youth too pure for this world, whose melancholy genius can't find a foothold in a society driven by cold commerce. 'The moon is a luminous floating tomb', goes one typically cheery Lenau lyric (it's this sense of the lunar/lunatic that gives the opera its name).

Lunea, of course, isn't the first time Holliger has explored this territory. Hölderlin was the focus of the *Scardanelli Cycle* (1975-91), and Robert Walser that of the Grammy-winning *Schneewittchen* (3/01). For *Lunea*, the librettist Händl Klaus set and expanded upon Lenau's poetry, and

the resulting opera is arranged not in three acts but in 23 'leaves'. Holliger was inspired to write the music, too, in small scraps. The opera's fragmentary style thus expresses the fragmentation of Lenau's mind.

Döbling insane asylum is the setting as Lenau becomes conscious of his reality collapsing. But as well as being in the world, we are in Lenau's head, and the distinction between outer and inner is porous throughout. Lenau recalls early bouts with madness, lost loves and his intensely close relationship with his late mother. There's a *High Fidelity* aspect as Lenau in his unhappiness reflects in turn on various women from his life. The narrative operates like a dream: abrupt transitions, overlain temporalities, nonsensical events alongside coherent ones.

Unfortunately, heard on disc, without the staging, *Lunea* is hard to follow. No English-language translation is given of the libretto, just a translation of the synopsis; neither does it help that eventually, with the increasingly fractured narrative and textual self-reflexivity, the synopsis itself becomes difficult to parse (the last few leaves are gnomic abstractions). The plot we can follow is heavy going: we're onlookers to someone's psychological deterioration. More comic moments to break up the gloom might have helped. At times the catalogue of misery is laid on so thick that it inadvertently tips over into the absurd.

The beautiful music on the album keeps things afloat. A chamber feel inheres; the orchestra rarely appears all at once. The opening is incantatory, with Lenau monotonously intoning his lines backed by swelling bass clarinet and umbral resonant gongs. There are striking duets and trios, such as in the eighth leaf, when the beloved Sophie and the fiancée Marie have a sprightly song in imitative counterpoint over jingling bells and a high shimmering violin. In the 15th leaf, muted brass chords and wordless distant choir are interspersed with silence evoking a vivid mindscape, the sun setting on Lenau. The music becomes

increasingly sparse as Lenau gives up on life; we end funereally with murmuring choir noise, string harmonics and a chorale of brass squeaks.

Christian Gerhaher is formidable as Lenau, at ease in the atonal idiom. His emotional range runs the gamut from at-wits'-end to shocked hush. Juliane Banse is similarly impressive as Sophie and Mother, kindling with a burnished tone the high-wire expressionism and playful *Sprechgesang* alike. Sarah Maria Sun, as the famed soprano Karoline Unger, stands out with a memorable 'mad aria' in the 11th leaf after being dumped by Lenau, moving from fluid registral shifts to febrile angularity. Ivan Ludlow is a solid, unshowy foil for Gerhaher's extravagance. Throughout, the Basler Madrigalisten evocatively dispatch Lenau's gloomy lyrics, often in a block atonal homophony that recalls Webern's cantatas, sometimes breaking into sub-groups or soloists.

Liam Cagney

Horneman

Aladdin

Bror Magnus Tødenes *ten*..... Aladdin

Dénise Beck *sop*..... Gulnare

Johan Reuter *bass-bar*..... Nouredin

Stephen Milling *bass*..... Sultan

Henning von Schulman *bass*..... Vizier

Hanne Fischer *mez*..... Morgiane

Steffen Bruun *bass*..... Genie of the Lamp

Elisabeth Jansson *mez*..... Genie of the Ring

Frederikke Kampmann *sop*..... First Handmaiden

Sidsel Aja Eriksen *mez*..... Second Handmaiden

Klaudia Kidon *sop*..... First Elf

Rikke Lender *mez*..... Second Elf

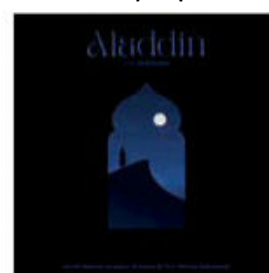
Jakob Soelberg *bass-bar*..... Messenger

Danish National Concert Choir and Symphony

Orchestra / Michael Schønwandt

Dacapo (6 200007 ③ • 2h 59')

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



The Overture to Christian Frederik Emil Horneman's *Aladdin* was once



Klaus Florian Vogt and Camilla Nylund star in Finnish National Opera's 2010 production of Korngold's *Die tote Stadt* – see review overleaf

among the most-performed pieces of Danish music. It is a thrilling eight-minute ride through the story made famous by Antoine Galland that has Beethovenian insistency, Schumannesque momentum and a sprinkling of Impressionistic magic. It was written quickly in the 1860s and taken up by the Gewandhaus Orchestra but the rest of the opera took another two decades to finish. Horneman was devastated after a shambolic last-minute staging of the work at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen in 1888, believing his life's work had been subjected to rank carelessness.

In 1902 the theatre had another go, mounting a decent staging of a revised score that ran for 18 performances. Denmark gathered its musical luminaries 118 years later for this expensive premiere recording, made across 13 sessions in August and November 2020 and using a new edition of the 1902 version. The November sessions also became a Covid-19 super-spreader event that wreaked havoc in the weeks after. Was it worth it?

Just about. As Schönwandt admits, *Aladdin* deserves its new place on record

if not back in the opera house – with clunky storytelling and ponderous poetry in Benjamin Feddersen's libretto but brilliant orchestration and some drama and charm in the music. As is his *modus operandi*, Schönwandt assembles a local cast used to prioritising text in the Danish language; for better or worse, you can hear every word. Stephen Milling is the stentorian Sultan, Johan Reuter the wily sorcerer Nouredin. Dénise Beck takes on Gulnare, a lyric soprano role with dramatic passages that seem to demand everything but coloratura. Bror Magnus Tødenes sings the title-role, again a lyric tenor with dramatic tendencies and a huge range.

It's the chorus that often deliver the dramatic coups, invading the texture with a combination of stern ceremony and dramatic impulse (Carl Nielsen, who played in the 1902 production, surely borrowed some of this for his own *Saul og David*). The professional Danish National Concert Choir never disappoint here. They often sound colossal, while the on-form Danish National Symphony Orchestra are fully engaged, with excellent differentiation of texture and beautiful

solos, particularly Ulla Miilman's room-stilling flute solo (that passage representing another device borrowed by Carl Nielsen, this time for *Maskerade*).

Elsewhere there's Beethoven, Gounod, Meyerbeer, Wagner and Weber – something approaching the magical mystery of the latter's Wolf's Glen scene in the moment Nouredin and Aladdin reach the cave that houses the lamp (Nouredin's long monologue before they reach the cave is sung with typical dramatic relish by Reuter). Tødenes's voice doesn't quite live up to the promise of the ringing brilliance we heard in his recorded debut seven years ago ('Remembering Jussi' – Simax, 6/15) but he sounds good and is touching in Aladdin's forlorn monologue 'Ak, nu er alt forbi', in which Schönwandt shows why singers love to work for him.

The Sultan's tender grieving aria 'Så hør mig, Aladdin' is movingly sung by Milling, using just a fraction of his colossal voice but letting you sense the full weight of it. Beck tackles her part's challenges with nuance but can sometimes sound a little tight. Hanne Fischer's take on Aladdin's mother Morgiane is worth hearing but her 'spinning wheel' scene goes on a bit. So,

in fact, does the whole thing – despite Schønwandt promising me in 2020 that this three-hour epic is indeed ‘the most condensed version of the score possible’. You have to admire Dacapo for going all in for this first recording, right up to its presentation in strong clamshell packaging and with a luxurious perfect-bound booklet. I’d still recommend streaming to ‘try before you buy.’

Andrew Mellor

Janáček



Jenůfa

Camilla Nylund *sop* Jenůfa
Evelyn Herltzius *sop* Kostelnička
Stuart Skelton *ten* Laca
Ladislav Elgr *ten* Števa
Hanna Schwarz *mez* Grandmother Buryjovka
Jan Martinik *bass* Foreman of the Mill
Adriane Queiroz *sop* Barena
David Oštrek *bass-bar* Mayor
Natalia Skrycka *mez* Mayor's Wife
Evelin Novak *sop* Karolka
Aytaj Shikhalizada *mez* Shepherdess
Victoria Randem *sop* Jano
Anna Kissjudit *contr* Auntie
Berlin State Opera Chorus; Staatskapelle Berlin /
Sir Simon Rattle

Stage director **Damiano Michieletto**

Video director **Beatrix Conrad**

C Major Entertainment

(760408 ; 760504 • 126')

Recorded live, February 2021

Includes synopsis



Following the release of Christof Loy's Deutsche Oper production (8/15), this is the second filmed *Jenůfa*

from Berlin to appear in the catalogue, captured in an empty Staatsoper at the height of lockdown in February 2021. It's a hugely powerful performance that, if anything, benefits from the placement of the chorus dotted, the regulation distance from one another, around the auditorium – initially distracting in Beatrix Conrad's video direction but taking on the almost ritualistic role of impassive observers as the whole tragedy unfurls in Act 3.

At the head of that tragedy is Evelyn Herltzius's astonishing Kostelnička, a portrayal of visceral dramatic force but which also nonetheless conveys the complexity of the character's motivations, showing glimpses of remaining humanity detectable despite years of suppressed pain and shame. She's in fine, penetrating voice, too, and this version is worth

seeing for that alone. But there's also a moving, powerfully acted performance of the title-role from Camilla Nylund: she's heartbreaking in Act 2 but convincingly forgiving at the redemptive close, and her soprano has just the right mixture of limpidity and power.

Stuart Skelton is superb as a heartbreakingly hopeless – in the most literal sense – Laca, and he sings with his customary big-hearted passion. Ladislav Elgr, also Števa at the Deutsche Oper, is excellent, the fragile, almost frantic machismo he portrays in Act 1 swiftly giving way to cowardice and, in Act 3, something closer to complete subservience. There's a fine supporting cast, including a vivid Grandmother Buryjovka from Hanna Schwarz (also repeating her role from the Deutsche Oper performance); Aytaj Shikhalizada, one of several members of the Staatsoper's International Opera Studio, stands out for her lively and immediately engaging Herds(wo)man.

In the pit, Simon Rattle secures playing of imposing lyrical sweep and power from the Staatskapelle. The conductor provides the foundations for a superb musical performance all round, the power of which is ably amplified by Damiano Michieletto's spare, concentrated production, beautifully lit by Alessandro Carletti.

Paolo Fantin's single set confines the action with hanging sheets of frosted glass or Perspex, with a series of minimalist benches serving different purposes – one is an omnipresent altar. Other symbols are used sparingly but powerfully: a block of ice, hacked to pieces by Števa in Act 1; a red baby blanket knitted by Jenůfa. Her decidedly *triste* rosemary plant and pathetic little flowers hint at a natural world that offers little in the way of consolation. Most imposingly, a large rock begins to descend from on high halfway through Act 2 (presumably the stone that Jenůfa imagines crushing her); in Act 3, meltwater drips down it into a jagged hole in the middle of the stage.

It doesn't always make for a unified, beautiful stage picture – for that, Loy's your man – but the fractured world Michieletto creates has a concentrated power of its own, while also ultimately showing itself capable of accommodating redemption. With Claus Guth's recent Royal Opera production also likely to make it on to DVD/Blu-ray soon, we're going to be spoilt for choice, but this new performance from Berlin can be highly recommended.

Hugo Shirley

Korngold

Die tote Stadt

Klaus Florian Vogt *ten* Paul
Camilla Nylund *sop* Marietta
Markus Eiche *bar* Frank
Sari Nordqvist *mez* Brigitta
Kaisa Ranta *sop* Juliette
Melis Jaatinen *mez* Lucienne
Per-Håkan Precht *ten* Victorin
Juha Riihimäki *ten* Count Albert
Chorus, Children's Chorus and Orchestra of
the Finnish National Opera / Mikko Franck

Opus Arte (OACD9050D ② • 143')

Recorded live, November 2010

Includes synopsis



This release lifts the audio from the DVD of Kasper Holten's production of

Korngold's opera released by Opus Arte in 2013, filmed at the Finnish National Opera three years earlier (1/14). Joining Donald Runnicles in Vienna (Orfeo, 11/05) and Sebastian Weigle in Frankfurt (Oehms, 12/11), we now have Mikko Franck in Helsinki and a third recommendable 21st-century audio recording of this outright operatic masterpiece, even if all three are taped live in the theatre and all three feature Klaus Florian Vogt in the lead role of Paul. (Vogt has just taken over the role from Jonas Kaufmann in Simon Stone's production at the Bavarian State Opera; the audio from the superlative DVD of the first run, conducted by Kirill Petrenko – A/21 – would likely be a contender, too).

The USP here is Finnish soprano Camilla Nylund apparently in the form of her life, radiant and effortless as she consistently powers and floats above Korngold's thrillingly noisy orchestra, embodying both skittish love interest and noble departed heroine. Marietta/Marie is far from an easy sing and hers is surely the most compelling rendition of the role on record. No less taxing is the ever-present Paul. Vogt's is front-footed but nuanced, benefiting from his consolidating performance in Frankfurt the year earlier. Sari Nordqvist is a bold Brigitta and Markus Eiche a touching Frank/Fritz.

So no complaints in the vocal department. But there is plenty more to get right in this opera, whose electrifying orchestral cut-and-thrust speaks of the moral and philosophical chaos of the 1920s even as it's spinning out wondrous tunes, and whose visionary 22-year-old

composer asks for plenty of brilliant 'special effects' he probably had yet to learn how to score efficiently. Franck prioritises top-line vocal lyricism and you can miss the depth, churn and strong rhythmic tectonics that to my ears make Weigle a top choice, just about.

Some of those ghostly moments – distant bands, dismembered choruses – are better in Frankfurt and Vienna and so present an audio performance that's more 'of a piece'. Franck's care with voices can also marginally curtail some of the score's mania, its nightmarishly freewheeling waltzes, post-Wagnerian gloom and crushing claustrophobia – an unparalleled depiction of grief. Either way, I'll treasure this recording for Nylund's performance and simply for its excuse to dwell on this music again. Some still say it's kitsch. I don't hear anything that doesn't serve a coruscating, highly original and ever-relevant drama.

Andrew Mellor

Monteverdi



Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria

Charles Workman *ten* Ulisse
Delphine Galou *contr* Penelope
Anicio Zorzi Giustiniani *ten* Telemaco
John Daszak *ten* Iro
Francesco Milanese *bass* Il Tempo
Marina De Liso *mez* Giunone
Eleonora Bellocchi *sop* La Fortuna
Gianluca Margheri *bar* Giove
Guido Loconsolo *bar* Nettuno
Arianna Vendittelli *sop* Minerva
Mark Milhofer *ten* Eumete
Hugo Hymas *ten* Eurimaco
Andrea Patucelli *bass* Antinoo
Accademia Bizantina / Ottavio Dantone

Stage director **Robert Carsen**

Video director **Tiziano Mancini**

Dynamic (37927 **DVD**; 57927 **Blu-ray**) • 3h 5'

Recorded live at the Teatro della Pergola, Florence, June 28 & 30, 2021

Includes synopsis



'What God watches over the sleeping?' asks Monteverdi's Ulisse in his first outpouring.

Here it's the whole damn lot of them – aristocratic spectators in the theatre of human life.

In 2016 director Robert Carsen and conductor Ottavio Dantone joined forces for a staging of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* in Lausanne. Last year they reunited in Florence for the composer's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* at the city's Maggio Musicale. With Covid restrictions still

severe, the stalls of the Teatro della Pergola were stripped away, leaving just a handful of seats – a reminder not only of the extraordinary circumstances of the production but of life lived and music made in the face of larger, more powerful forces.

Whether by accident or design, Carsen's concept makes much of this moment. Mirroring the auditorium with its neat gilded boxes on the stage, placing Human Frailty (now a trio of singers, rather than a single figure) around the house itself, both embraces and implicates his viewers – playthings, all, of the Gods who sit splendid in red velvet throughout, looking down on the action below, on and off stage.

Luis Carvalho's costumes designs give us Renaissance Gods, arranged by Carsen with all the care of an Old Master, and lit to that effect by Peter van Praet. The subtle play of shadows must have been spectacular in the theatre; on DVD it loses clarity, with too much of the detail and depth of the space lost in semi-obscurity.

The contemporary human world below is clearer: a non-specific space of conflict (Charles Workman's Ulisse sports military fatigues) and luxury (Penelope's palace is staffed by smart chambermaids, peopled with eurotrash suitors, pastel pullovers artfully slung over their expensively tailored shoulders). In Carsen's hands their collision is bloodless – there's no gore or even much grotesque here, even from John Daszak's Iro – but far from unemotional.

This is thanks both to strong casting and Dantone's impossibly rich, inventive orchestral realisation – sonic lighting that throws emphasis and casts shadow, guiding the ear as effectively as any designer. The contrast he achieves between the softly, freshly pastoral world of Eumete (Mark Milhofer, especially moving in his brief duet with Ulisse), with its musette-like haze of woodwind and strings, and the brash brilliance of the court is startling.

The cameos are deftly sketched: Hugo Hymas's thrusting Eurimaco, resonant and passionate, Andrea Patucelli's Antinoo (all swagger and throb), Guido Loconsolo's inky Nettuno. But it's Workman and his Penelope, Delphine Galou, who give Carsen's understatement anchoring gravitas and feeling. There's a nobility to Workman's hero (no obvious trauma or rage here) that finds answer in Galou's staunch queen, who can turn her contralto from

sexless, countertenor coolness to sudden youth and warmth in an instant. The final scene is breathless in its musical reinventions: taking us from numbness to a rapturous, erotic ending in a thrilling tumble of musical action after so much suspension.

Alexandra Coghlan

Saint-Saëns

Henry VIII

Michael Chioldi *bar* Henry VIII
Ellie Dehn *sop* Catherine d'Aragon
Hilary Ginther *mez* Anne Boleyn
Yeghishe Manucharyan *ten* Don Gomez de Feria
David Kravitz *bar* Le Duc de Norfolk
Kevin Deas *bass-bar* Cardinal Campeggio
Matthew DiBattista *ten* Le Comte de Surrey
David Cushing *bass-bar* Archbishop of Canterbury
Erin Merceruio Nelson *sop* Lady Clarence
Jeremy Ayres Fisher *ten* The Garter King of Arms
Odyssey Opera Chorus and Orchestra / Gil Rose

Odyssey Opera (001005 ④) • 4h 04'

Recorded live at Jordan Hall, Boston, September 21, 2019

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



First performed at the Paris Opéra in 1883, *Henry VIII* was one of the

works, along with *Étienne Marcel* (1879) and *Ascanio* (1890), with which Saint-Saëns sought to re-establish French *grand opéra* as a form capable of countering the prevailing Wagnerism he had come to distrust. Based on Calderón's *La cisma de Inglaterra* ('The Schism in England') and Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, it dramatises the collapse of the King's marriage to Catherine of Aragon, his growing obsession with Anne Boleyn and his establishment of the Church of England, before culminating in a cliffhanger ending in which Henry becomes convinced of Anne's betrayal precisely at the moment of Catherine's death.

The narrative, however, is by no means historically accurate. Wolsey is conspicuous by his absence, and the Reformation is presented as a popular uprising against papal influence. Anne, meanwhile, is haunted by a past relationship, not with an English nobleman but a Spanish diplomat, Gomez de Feria, once her lover in France, now ambassador to Henry's court: one of her letters to him is now in Catherine's possession, and the plot partly hangs upon whether the Queen, the tragic protagonist whose actions dictate the opera's moral

compass, will reveal both its existence and contents.

Like many works written for the Opéra, its textual history is complex, with substantial cuts imposed before the premiere and further excisions made during the initial run to produce the standard score that has formed the basis of its subsequent revivals. For this new recording, however, Odyssey Opera use an Urtext edition by Hugh Macdonald, which restores all the omitted material, including the big septet at the close of Act 2, a magnificent if recriminatory duet for Anne and Gomez in the same act, and the later confrontation between the angry King and the Papal Legate, Catherine's defender, a scene over which the Philip/Inquisitor duet from *Don Carlos* inevitably looms large.

The performance is engrossing, if uneven. Gil Rose conducts with a measured inexorability that grips from start to finish. The playing is excellent, nowhere more so than in the great march that ushers in the Synod scene, while the chorus, though fractionally too few in number, are consistently strong. Some of the cast, however, take time to get into their stride, a drawback of recording live at a single performance. Gomez is saddled, Radamès-like, with having to sing his main aria within minutes of curtain up, and Yeghishe Manucharyan's upper registers only settle when he is way beyond it. Hilary Ginther's dark-voiced Anne similarly takes a while to strike form, but is splendid by the time we reach the restored duet with Manucharyan, where she's simply thrilling.

No one, though, could have any qualms about Michael Chioldi's Henry or Ellie Dehn's Catherine. He gives us a wonderfully sung, complex portrait of an experienced politician in the grip of desire, icily self-controlled in public, but in private capable of turning in a flash from seductive charm to emotional violence. Dehn sounds ravishing throughout and is equally convincing as a woman determined to preserve her integrity in the face of every provocation that her enemies can throw at her. The recording itself is admirably clear: only the final applause reminds us it was made live. The accompanying booklet, however, regrettably omits the texts of some of Macdonald's restorations. Despite its flaws, it's an important issue and a major addition to the Saint-Saëns discography.

Tim Ashley

Tesori

Blue

Kenneth Kellogg *bass* The Father
Briana Hunter *mez* The Mother
Aaron Crouch *ten* The Son
Gordon Hawkins *bar* The Reverend
Ariana Wehr *sop* Girlfriend 1/Congregant 1/Nurse
Katerina Burton *sop* Girlfriend 2/Congregant 2
Rehanna Thelwell *mez* Girlfriend 3/Congregant 3
Joshua Blue *ten* Policeman 1/Male Congregant 1
Martin Luther Clark *ten* Policeman 2/Male Congregant 2

..... Policeman 3/Male Congregant 3
Christian Simmons *bass-bar*
..... Policeman 3/Male Congregant 3

The Washington National Opera Orchestra / Roderick Cox

Pentatone (PTC5186 967 ② • 122')

Includes synopsis and libretto



While themes of racial discrimination, injustice and racially motivated violence

have simmered under the surface of the American musical theatre tradition for decades, rarely have they been presented in such a direct and unflinching manner as in Jeanine Tesori's recent opera *Blue*. Premiered in July 2019, less than a year prior to the murder of George Floyd, librettist Tazewell Thompson's stirring storyline recounts the fate of a family of black Americans who live in present-day Harlem.

In Act 1, a young mother-to-be excitedly informs her female friends that she is married and will soon be giving birth to a boy. Her friends are alarmed to find out that her husband is a police officer, but she declares her undying love for him. They also express fears about her baby boy, warning her: 'Thou shalt bring forth no Black boys into this world!' When the husband shares the same news with his police colleagues down at the local sports club, they respond far more positively.

The general atmosphere during these opening exchanges is light-hearted, carefree and jovial, supported by what Naomi André describes in her booklet notes as Tesori's 'polyphonic voice', where the sounds and gestures of musical theatre are combined with vocal expression and projection that is more operatic. This is aided by Kenneth Kellogg and Briana Hunter's strong characterisations of the roles of the father and the mother.

By the end of Act 1, however, the mood has changed as the story moves forwards several years. The father's teenage son (sung by Aaron Crouch) is now a political

activist who takes part in protests demanding racial equality. The son despises the fact that his father is a policeman and refuses to bring his friends around ('Nobody wants to come over with a cop on the premises').

Then, at the beginning of Act 2, we learn the son has been shot in a street protest. The father swears to seek revenge on the policeman who committed the crime. A local reverend fails in his attempts to reason with him, while the grief-stricken mother is consoled by her friends as she prepares for her son's funeral.

The final scenes of the opera thus resemble an oratorio in its use of prayer, congregational singing and music's power to comfort and heal. All 10 soloists are brought together in a series of increasingly passionate *a cappella* statements that draw melodic inspiration from both spiritual songs and Bach-like harmonic progressions. An extended Epilogue provides one final twist, where father, mother and son are reunited in a foreboding bittersweet moment, where the son reassures his parents that nothing bad will happen to him.

Blue succeeds in articulating the complex nature of race and identity in American society in a manner that is direct and immediate, and whose impact may only be fully understood in years to come.

Pwyll ap Siôn

Wagner

Parsifal

Julian Hubbard *ten* Parsifal
Tómas Tómasson *bar* Amfortas
John Relyea *bass-bar* Gurnemanz
Catherine Hunold *sop* Kundry
Thomas Gazheli *bass-bar* Klingsor
Alexei Tanovitski *bass* Titurel

Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Massimo, Palermo / Omer Meir Wellber

Stage director **Graham Vick**

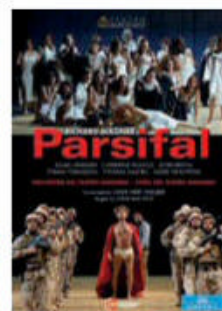
Video director **Tiziano Mancini**

C Major Entertainment

(759308 DVD; 759404 Blu-ray Disc • 3h 45')

Recorded live 2020

Includes synopsis



Filmed at Palermo's Teatro Massimo shortly before Covid struck in early 2020, this *Parsifal* represents one of the last productions staged by director Graham Vick before he himself died due to complications with the disease in July 2021. It's a characteristically serious



Briana Hunter as The Mother and Kenneth Kellogg as The Father offer strong characterisations in Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson's *Blue*

and thought-provoking piece of work, a critique of religious intolerance – and even of religion itself – that concludes in offering redemption on a straightforwardly human level.

In Timothy O'Brien's set we're presented with little more than a chipboard stage. It's variously adorned with a dead tree, a floral backdrop and a long curtain that serves as a canvas for shadow plays, some illustrative of what's being narrated, some rather more baffling. Among other things, the stage hides an oversize icon of Mary Magdalene, against which Kundry effects Act 2's seduction, and an enamel mug – the sort-of grail – into which Amfortas, in loincloth and crown of thorns, squeezes blood for the assembled company to drink.

That image is a viscerally shocking one but is not the only time that I was reminded of Uwe Eric Laufenberg's 2016 Bayreuth production (DG, A/17), which also, like Vick's, features an Amfortas-as-Christ, as well as burka-wearing Kundry and Flower Maidens. Also like Laufenberg's production, we seem to be in the Middle East, but here matters are further complicated by the fact

that Gurnemanz appears to be wearing a tallith for Act 1 – a hint at Jewishness that seems in any case to have dissolved in Act 3.

Perhaps the specifics of these religious signifiers are less important than the fact that the action takes place against a background of military conflict resulting, one assumes, from religious difference. The Grail Knights are Kalashnikov-toting soldiers, Klingsor a rogue operator who spends a fair bit of time waddling around with his trousers round his ankles, exposing the bloody patch on his underpants. At the close, the soldiers, now battle-scarred and wounded, and Flower Maidens are reunited as couples and families – touching, perhaps, but it's hardly the hit of transcendence Wagnerians are likely to be after.

The effect of the production is underlined by Omer Meir Wellber's conducting, which is swift – we come in at around 3 hours 40 minutes – and straightforward. It's an admirably honest approach, I suppose, with decent orchestral playing. There are some excellent vocal performances, though, with Julian Hubbard an appealingly boyish, unaffected

Parsifal opposite Catherine Hunold's finely sung Kundry. John Relyea is superb as Gurnemanz, his bass on reassuringly resonant and authoritative form.

It's impossible to take one's eyes off either Tómas Tómasson's compelling Amfortas, or, perhaps for slightly different reasons, Thomas Gazheli's grimly unhinged Klingsor.

Overall, though, one is left with the sense of a *Parsifal* that goes only skin deep. Well filmed and with good sound, the production offers plenty to think about. For profundity as well as provocation, though, one needs to go elsewhere, to Tcherniakov and Barenboim in Berlin (BelAir Classiques, 10/16), for example.

Hugo Shirley

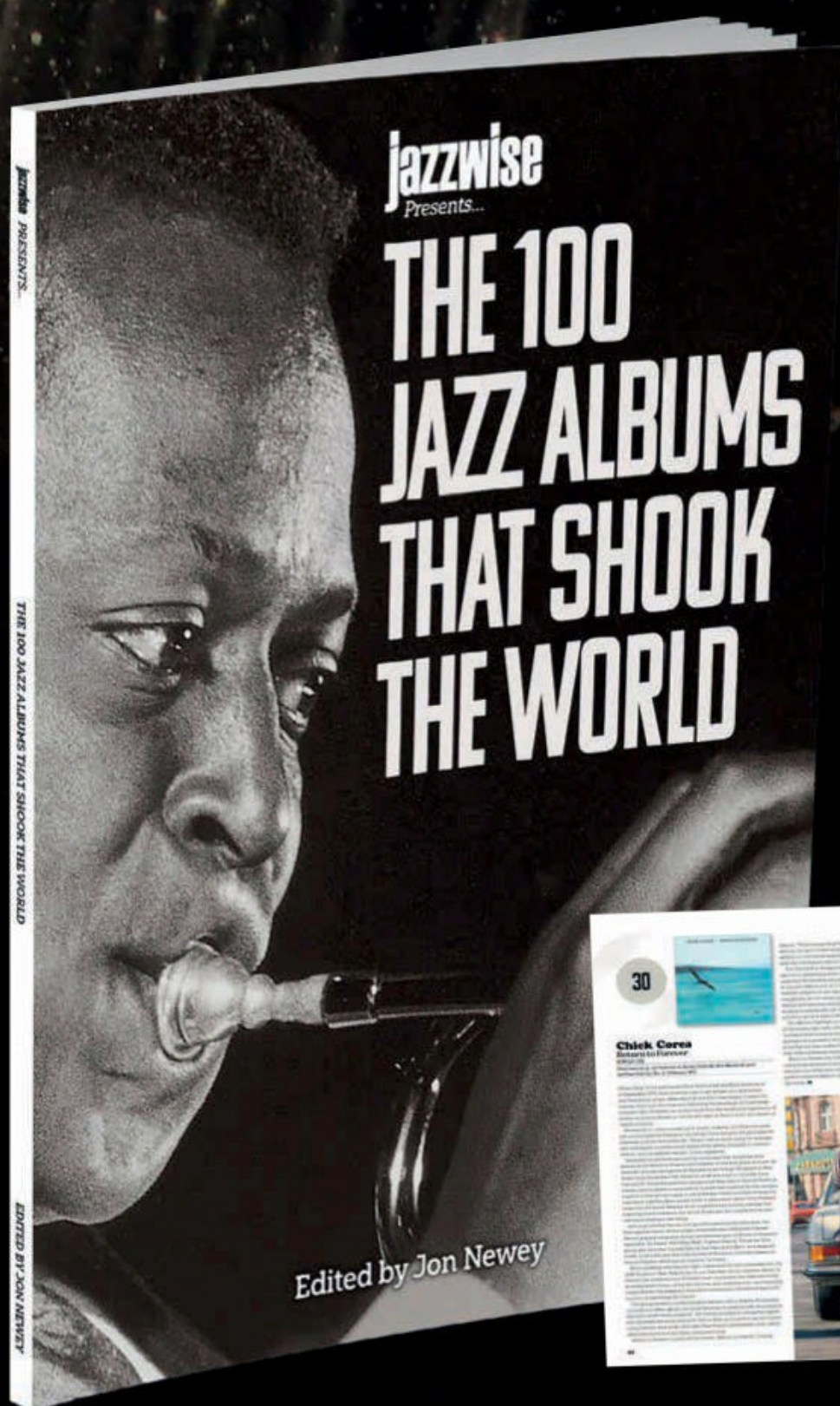


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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

Espen Eriksen Trio featuring Andy Sheppard

In the Mountains

Rune Grammofon RCD 2227



Espen Eriksen followed pianists Tord Gustavsen and Helge Lien into Silje Nergaard's band. One of Scandinavia's top jazz

singers, she is a shrewd judge of musical talent, with each pianist emerging the better for their experience and going on to become successful bandleaders in their own right. Since 2010, Eriksen has released four trio albums on Rune Grammofon, 2018's *Perfectly Unhappy* with Andy Sheppard on tenor sax. *In the Mountains*, his sixth album for the label, continues this association on three tracks – '1974', 'Anthem' and 'In the Mountains' – recorded at Oslo's Nasjonal Jazzscene jazz club during their joint tour of

northern Europe. Both Eriksen and Sheppard are elegant, lyrical and melodically assured improvisers, mature and secure in their conception. The remaining tracks on the album are taken from live appearances by the trio in 2020 and 2021, which taken together comprise an album of classy, inventive jazz improvisation that's pretty near perfect. **Stuart Nicholson**

Christian McBride

The Q Sessions

Mack Avenue



Described as an EP (though it's hardly shorter than some old-fashioned LPs), this set was originally set up as an exclusive for the streaming service Qobuz. Now more widely available, it presents a basic blowing session of just three tunes with

a slightly unexpected personnel. Mike Stern, described as 'one of my favourite guitarists' by McBride, is seldom associated with such straight-ahead post-bop contexts – the two longest items are a themeless medium-tempo blues (which then ends with a chorus of Ornette's 'Blues Connotation') and that old favourite 'On Green Dolphin Street'. Saxophonist Marcus Strickland too fits right in, with typical extended solos which brighten up the material, and it's clear that both main soloists are stimulated by the solid foundation laid down by McBride and drummer Eric Harland, while McBride's own solos are not unexpectedly exciting. The 4-and-a-half minute closing original 'Brouhaha', apparently inspired by the then recently departed Chick Corea, is sprightly but angular with a 16-bar chorus in a Latin-rock vein, and grooves mightily. It leaves the listener wanting more, but this is all there is, so far. **Brian Priestley**

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

Catrin Finch & Seckou Keita

ECHO

bendigedig



It's been ten years now since Catrin Finch, the classically-trained Welsh harpist, first began working with Seckou

Keita, the British-based exponent of the West African traditional harp, the kora, and in that time they have created some of the finest, most gently elegant and thrilling fusion music on the planet. The duo effortlessly mix influences from Western classical or folk music with African styles, showing a remarkable musical empathy as they trade solos in their emotional, atmospheric compositions. The opening 'Gobaith' (Welsh for 'Hope') is a gloriously uplifting, melodic instrumental, while on 'Dimanche' the strings combine with kora

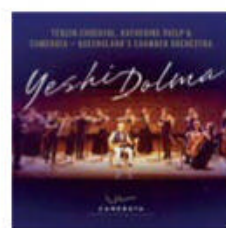
and harp to provide backing for Seckou's thoughtfully emotional voice. Elsewhere, the three tracks without added strings include the slinky, almost jazzy 'Dual Rising' and the remarkable finale, 'Julu Kuta', a subtle and lengthy piece with constant changes of musical direction. Magnificent.

Robin Denselow

Tenzin Choegyal, Katherine Philp & Camerata - Queensland's Chamber Orchestra

Yeshe Dolma

Camerata - Queensland's Chamber Orchestra



Tenzin Choegyal from Tibet and Australian Katherine Philp come from totally different backgrounds, however, as in many cases, the emotional mystery of music brought a Western classical-trained

lead cellist together with an exiled traditional singer and multi-instrumentalist. Added to the mix is the 20-stringed Camerata – Queensland's Chamber Orchestra, which start the album by playing Philp's composition 'Dolma'. The richly structured single chord is the foundation for a sweet violin solo partly based on a north-eastern Tibetan melody. It segues into 'Nomad Song', a composition by Choegyal in which his powerful and emotional keening voice sings about flying home to a country where there has been a cultural genocide since 1959. Co-composed, the track 'Wo La So' starts with Choegyal's speedily plucked dranyen (a six-string fretless Tibetan lute). Philp introduces the beautiful melody on the cello and then Tenzin's more plaintive voice sings of letting go and accepting change.

Michael Ormiston

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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Listen to something spatial

Peter Quantrill surrounds himself with some recent recordings and remasterings

Not before time, you might think – roughly a year since Apple Music opened its Spatial Audio service – classical labels are releasing (or reissuing) albums of repertoire originally composed with an immersive listening experience in mind. However, the difference between a new recording made with the technology *in situ* and one back-remastered with the Dolby Atmos software is thrown into sharp relief by the 2005 Naxos album of **Tallis** sung by the Oxford Camerata. The acoustic of All Hallows' Gospel Oak is palpable; so is the left-to-right disposition of the eight five-part choirs in *Spem in alium*, arranged in an arc (so it seems) with the middle choirs considerably further away from the listener's perspective than the outer ones. Thus some polyphonic voices are much less equal than others, and there is no impression of the kind of surround-sound perspective afforded by live performances that really do place the audience within a circle of 40 individual parts.

Turn to DG's new **Bach St John Passion** – and John Eliot Gardiner's third – for a much fuller demonstration of the possibilities within Spatial Audio for a penetrating gaze inside the score. In the ritornello of Bach's opening chorus, Gardiner has always shone a light on the sighing viola line, which otherwise tends to be drowned by the chromatic oboe duet above it and grinding basso beneath. In the new version, all moving parts are held in equilibrium as if in emulation of the clockwork mechanisms Bach often composed into his most mortality-obsessed pieces. Not that any aspect of the performance in itself is mechanical: the text is articulated with exceptional finesse, generous legato and any number of not-so-subtle rhetorical shadings.

The recitatives and arias bring an even more striking impression of a sound stage with vertical as well as horizontal dimensions, and the full use of Oxford's

Sheldonian Theatre. Without recourse to the film version it's easy to see Nick Pritchard's Evangelist with the mind's ear, high up to the left, and William Thomas's Christus off to the right with a gutsy basso section between and choir arrayed (socially distanced) behind them. Thus the score – and the story of the Passion – opens up like a children's book or illuminated manuscript.

Classical labels are releasing albums of repertoire with an immersive listening experience in mind

The double-choir and -orchestra architecture of the *St Matthew* lends itself even more literally to Spatial Audio, though not in the last (slowest, heaviest and least successful) of Karl Richter's recordings for DG/Archiv (the second of which, given live in Tokyo on a 1969 tour, has still never made it from LP to CD, not even in the otherwise essential DG compendium – 9/18). The more natural pacing and airier sound of Richter's classic first version, from 1958 (5/59), would have made it a more obvious candidate for remastering.

However, a much more positive kind of intimacy is engineered by the Harmonia Mundi team behind Raphaël Pichon's new recording with Pygmalion (*Gramophone* Recording of the Month in April). Finally (how did it take so long?) there is a pulse-led, passacaglia swing and intensity to the opening chorus to rival Scherchen on Westminster, and the kind of unembarrassed broadening and placing of the final cadence that period doctrine has tended to shun as a romantic indulgence. Meanwhile the relatively small forces and close miking draw the performers in a tight circle round the listener: Spatial Audio heightens the degree to which the masks

worn by both Passions seem to have been swapped around in this complementary pair of new Passion recordings.

Compared to the Oxford Camerata on Naxos, the 2005 Tallis Scholars album of **Allegri** and **Palestrina** on Gimell – itself a remake of the 1980 LP that launched both ensemble and label (10/80) – is much more responsive to nuances of spatial depth brought out by remastering in the new format. The ripieno ensemble – including Deborah Roberts and her sequence of top Cs exquisitely integrated within the chant-like ebb and flow of the line – is set back some way in the Chapel of Merton College, Oxford, far enough to give the impression on headphones of their verses being sung from behind the listener, while glowing blocks of homophonic declamation from the main choir pile up and around the listener from a front-seat perspective.

Nilento is a boutique Swedish label, working out of a rural studio south of Gothenburg, which has begun to specialise in recordings made with Dolby Atmos. Its new version of the Swedish Mass by **Johan Helmich Roman** (searchable under its original title, *Then Svenska Messan*, on Apple Music and other streaming services) should appeal to anyone interested in the byways of early Classicism: the only complete available version of a large-scale *Missa brevis* (*Kyrie* and *Gloria* only) in 13 sections of brief arias and (mostly) choruses.

First performed in 1751 (as detailed in the comprehensive PDF booklet available from the label's website), Roman's piece invites comparison not with other vernacular Mass settings such as Schubert's *Deutsche Messe* or the edgy *Empfindsamkeit* idiom of contemporary sacred masterpieces by CPE Bach and Zelenka, but rather the invigorating, folkloristic simplicity of the Masses by the Czech Jakub Jan Ryba. Led from the harpsichord by their founder Magnus Kjelsson, the local Göteborg



Oxford's Sheldonian in Spatial Audio: John Eliot Gardiner conducts Bach's St John Passion

Baroque play with a polished modern-Baroque sensibility and lute-enriched continuo, though the Spatial Audio sound exposes some occasionally raw choral singing without (paradoxically) matching the inner-part clarity of Pygmalion's *St Matthew*.

Streaming is no longer the only way to experience Spatial Audio; traditionally minded readers who like to own their music should investigate the Dutch audiophile label TRPTK (say it out loud), which also makes its recordings available to download in various formats, ranging up to €35 for ultra high-resolution DXD9.1. Naturalistic ambience is a signal virtue of the **Schubert** *Winterreise* recorded in October last year by baritone Michael Wilmering and pianist Daan Boertien, to a degree rarely encountered even on major-label albums. From an imagined space around 10 rows back, I quickly learnt to live with his slightly uneven timbre with the considerable compensation of his feeling for Müller's text. While not venturing into the realms of mental disturbance hinted at by Gerhaher or Goerne, Wilmering paints the frozen waterfall, the petulance and delusion of 'Frühlingstraum' and the wanderer's encroaching isolation within a central tradition of *Winterreise* interpretations, and he is especially effective at evoking a 'recital-realistic' set of connections between the songs.

Still more impressive is the sonic imagination of **Arc** from the Intercontinental Ensemble on the same label: a collection of chamber music by female composers which opens with the

entrancing, Stravinskian textures and self-contained gestures of *Collage van een Achtvlak* ('Collage of an Octagon') by the Dutch composer and cellist Bianca Bongers. A nonet arrangement of Clara Schumann's *Drei Romanzen* wraps the individual musicians around the listener without lessening the warmth of their rapport. *September I* by Sarah Neutkens evokes the passing of summer with a wistfulness that doesn't outstay its six minutes, prefacing a broad and deeply invested account of Louise Farrenc's Nonet that succeeds in bringing its Schubertian heritage to the fore without unfavourable comparison.

The TRPTK releases are also available as (comparatively old-fashioned) SACDs, whereas the disarmingly titled collection of **Pop Songs** by the cellist Jan Vogler is streaming only from Sony Classical. Moving from Monteverdi's 'Pur ti miro' through to 'Billie Jean' from Michael Jackson's 'Thriller', by way of 'Casta diva' and 'O du, mein holder Abendstern', Vogler takes a free and thoroughly cellistic approach to the art of transcription, so that the *Affekt* of 'Vedrò con mio diletto' from Vivaldi's *Giustino* is transformed from a plangent lament into the kind of disaffected diary-page torn from a Smiths or Joy Division album. More disconcerting is the abrupt switch in production values between classical and pop tracks, from the close but concert-hall ambience of Gershwin's 'Summertime' to the Lennon/McCartney 'Golden slumbers', in which the BBC Philharmonic (fierily directed by Omer Meir Wellber) are relegated to a hazy backing track.

The Japanese flautist and Instagram star Cocomi also calls upon some distinguished support for **de l'amour**, her debut album on Japanese Decca (streaming only for now). The pianist Niu Niu plays all of Rachmaninov's notes and many more of his own in the 'Vocalise'. A version of 'The Swan' from *The Carnival of the Animals* features an entirely new introduction and beautifully shaded accompaniment from the guitarist Miloš. Cocomi herself is forwardly balanced but expressively anonymous, though an arrangement of Poulenc's 'Les chemins d'amour' brings a welcome flash of temperament, and a none-too-comfortably recorded David Garrett has been spliced in to duet with her in the *Méditation* from *Thaïs*.

By contrast, every bar of the Berlin Classics **Lumière** album from Céline Moinet, principal oboist with the Staatskapelle Dresden, breathes Frenchness. In another example of the kind of close-miked studio sound typical for artist showcases, Spatial Audio adds little to the ambience but rounds out her singing tone, especially in the upper register, and gives a helpful nudge to Florian Uhlig's piano so that the Forlane of *Le tombeau de Couperin* is shaped as an authentically neoclassical exchange of voices. The entire suite works so well in this version, holding pastoral *cantabile* and percussive energy in perfect equilibrium, that I wonder we don't hear it more often. Poulenc supplies another highlight with the angular Trio, where Moinet and Uhlig are joined by bassoonist Sophie Dervaux. The four-minute *Andante* is one of those Poulenc moments where flowing waters suddenly run deep, and Moinet and Dervaux answer each other's phrases with the Mozartian pathos of Poulenc's Carmelites in their convent before throwing off all care in the liberating final Rondo. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

Tallis Spem in alium **Oxford Camerata** Naxos

JS Bach St John Passion **Monteverdi Ch;**
EBS / Gardiner DG (3/22)

JS Bach St Matthew Passion **Munich Bach**
Orch / K Richter DG/Archiv (5/80)

JS Bach St Matthew Passion **Pygmalion /**
Pichon Harmonia Mundi (4/22)

Allegrì Miserere **Palestrina** Missa Papae
Marcelli **Tallis Scholars / Phillips** Gimell (4/07)

Roman Then Svenska Messan
Göteborg Baroque / Kjellsson Nilento

Schubert Winterreise

Wilmering, Boertien TRPTK

'Arc' Intercontinental Ens TRPTK

'Pop Songs' Vogler; **BBC PO / Wellber**
Sony Classical

'de l'amour' Cocomi Decca Japan

'Lumière' Moinet Berlin Classics

Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes

Mark Pullinger revels in the music the impresario commissioned for his Parisian troupe

‘Your Majesty, I’m like you. I don’t work. I do nothing, but I am indispensable.’ Sergey Diaghilev’s classic response to King Alfonso of Spain’s question, ‘And what do you do in the Company?’ said it all. As the founder of the Ballets Russes, Diaghilev’s indispensable quality was to align a dizzying constellation of the world’s most extraordinary creative talents. Among them were designers Léon Bakst and Alexandre Benois, choreographers Mikhail Fokine, Vaslav Nijinsky and Georges Balanchine, plus a wealth of composers, most notably Igor Stravinsky, who got his big break with *The Firebird*.

Can you think of another bumper box-set that celebrates an impresario? Diaghilev really was that important. His commissioning changed the direction of ballet music, which suddenly became much more composer-centric. To mark the 150th anniversary of his birth, Warner Classics has curated a splendid 22-disc box that really does Diaghilev’s inspirational leadership justice.

It is beautifully presented. The 44 ballets (about two thirds of the works the Ballets Russes staged) are arranged chronologically, from *Le pavillon d’Armide* in its inaugural 1909 season in Paris through to *The Prodigal Son* in 1929. Each of the 22 slipcases is adorned with photographs depicting dancers in those ballets: Tamara Karsavina as the Firebird, Anna Pavlova as Odette, Nijinsky as Petrushka and Faune, Léonide Massine as Pulcinella and so forth. Hearing the works in chronological order, it’s fascinating, for example, to reflect that Tcherepnin’s ravishing score to *Narcisse et Écho*, with its wordless chorus, came a year before Ravel’s *Daphnis et Chloé* and not after, or to be reminded that Debussy’s shadowy *Jeux* premiered just a fortnight before Stravinsky’s *Le sacre du printemps*.

For the most part, the recordings have been well chosen. With the Ballets Russes performing mainly in Paris (there were



Diaghilev with one his key collaborators, Stravinsky, who got his big break with *The Firebird*

also seasons in London, Monte Carlo and Rome), it’s fitting that French orchestras appear. I adore André Cluytens’s Paris Conservatoire *Daphnis et Chloé* and *Jeux*, as well as an impetuous *Invitation to the Dance*, danced in *Le spectre de la rose*. Jean Martinon and the Orchestre National de l’ORTF excel in Florent Schmitt’s *La tragédie de Salomé* and Dukas’s *La Péri*, while Pierre Dervaux and the Orchestre de Paris bring Gallic flair to Satie’s *Mercury*.

Diaghilev’s quality was to align a dizzying constellation of the most extraordinary creative talents

Igor Markevitch, who was himself commissioned by Diaghilev as a composer, conducts a number of works here. There are rarities recorded with the Orchestre National de l’Opéra de Monte-Carlo, such as Sauguet’s *La chatte*, Auric’s *Les fâcheux* and Milhaud’s *Le train bleu*, all taken from a ‘Diaghilev at Monte Carlo’ LP set, licensed from Guilde Internationale du Disque. The Warner box includes Markevitch’s Philharmonia disc of Prokofiev’s *Le pas d’acier*, but the real knockout is their 1959 *Sacre*, one of the very finest in the catalogue, which captures the savagery of the score, especially in the ferocious ‘Danse sacrée’.

It’s a shame Markevitch recorded *Apollon musagète* for Philips, so for Balanchine’s

first original choreography to Stravinsky (1928), Warner has turned to Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic. It’s here that you realise the paucity of its Stravinsky catalogue – where are the golden-age French orchestras in this repertoire? Rattle and the CBSO are decent in *Petrushka* and Seiji Ozawa and the Boston Symphony do a fine *Firebird*, although they could have picked his earlier, more atmospheric Orchestre de Paris account.

Warner doesn’t have a lot of choice in its Tchaikovsky ballets either, but André

Previn’s *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty* with the LSO are highly enjoyable, even if they’ve been superseded. Ozawa appears with the Chicago Symphony in a rather tame *Sheherazade* but an exciting *Polovtsian Dances* (Borodin’s *Prince Igor* was presented in that initial 1909 season). Other highlights include Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos and the Philharmonia in a scorching *Three-Cornered Hat*.

There have been some canny acquisitions, too. *Le pavillon d’Armide* is licensed from Naxos (a 1994 Moscow recording which is not in fabulous sound, but it’s a delightful score). *Narcisse et Écho* comes courtesy of Chandos (Rozhdestvensky), Prokofiev’s *Chout* from Decca (Abbado) and *The Prodigal Son* via Naxos (Marin Alsop).

The final disc (a photo of Diaghilev with Jean Cocteau on the cover) is devoted to historical recordings, including Feodor Chaliapin singing excerpts from *Boris Godunov* (the opera presented by Diaghilev in 1908, the year before the first Ballets Russes season) and a gripping *Sacre du printemps* with the ‘Grand Orchestre Symphonique’ under Pierre Monteux – who conducted its riotous 1913 premiere – recorded in Salle Pleyel in 1929 ... the very year Diaghilev died. In short, an indispensable box. **G**

THE RECORDING

Diaghilev – Ballets Russes

Warner Classics (22 discs) 9029 64771-5

BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan listens in to a great German conductor and a pair of French pianists

Last August in these pages I welcomed five sets on the Scribendum label devoted to the art of the distinguished if musically controversial German

conductor **Hans Knappertsbusch**, or ‘Kna’ as he was referred to by those who knew him. Now Eloquence follows suit with two equally desirable sets that cover a generous trawl taken from the Polydor, Decca and Westminster labels, one dealing with opera recordings, the other consisting mostly of orchestral repertoire. The operas (which were not represented as part of the Scribendum series) are predominantly by Wagner, though first to emerge is Beethoven’s *Fidelio* (1961–62) with a cast that includes Jan Peerce and Sena Jurinac. This takes its time – literally – to gather momentum, though for Florestan’s scene at the start of Act 2 Peerce’s trumpeting declamation is virtually as impressive as it had been under Toscanini in 1944 (RCA, 10/56).

Wieland Wagner is alleged to have said that ‘Kna didn’t do, he just was’. Statuesque, craggy-faced, a blunt, growling Kapellmeister with a kindly heart, Munich’s beloved maestro was known for his slow tempos, though he could on occasion whip up a frenzy, as he does in the electrifying VPO *Tannhäuser* Overture and Venusberg Music (or the earlier LPO version) in the Orchestral box. The same set includes numerous Wagner preludes and ‘bleeding chunks’, often in duplicate versions (be warned, though, that the late stereo Westminsters are often rather dull), played post-war by the VPO, LPO, Suisse Romande Orchestra and Munich PO, and pre-war by the Berlin Philharmonic, a highlight being the Transformation Music from Act 1 of *Parsifal*. As for the rest of the Orchestral set, we have imposing Bruckner based on discredited editions (though Bruckner live on Scribendum is generally superior), impressively executed Brahms and Beethoven concertos with Clifford Curzon, lighter Viennese fare stylishly turned and much more, most of it recorded in stereo.

But for me, and in spite of numerous personal favourites harboured in the superbly transferred Orchestral set, it’s the Opera collection that wins the ultimate accolade. It always amazes me how much fresher Kirsten Flagstad sounded on her



October 1957 VPO recording of *Die Walküre*’s first act than she did in key arias included as part of a Wagner recital disc from May 1956. George London, Knappertsbusch and the VPO conjure foreboding in *The Flying Dutchman*’s ‘Die Frist ist um’, while scenes from *Meistersinger* and Wotan’s Farewell from *Walküre* are no less effective. The complete VPO *Meistersinger* with Paul Schöffler as Hans Sachs, recorded in September 1950 and September 1951, finds Knappertsbusch at his most affable and emotionally generous, though the uproarious riot that closes Act 2 is just that. And yet still the most memorable inclusions are the two live Bayreuth recordings of *Parsifal*, the second and swifter option from 1962 with Jess Thomas as Parsifal and Irene Dalis as Kundry. London is cast as Amfortas on both sets and Hans Hotter is a magnificent Gurnemanz, but quite aside from Martha Mödl’s searingly intense portrayal of Kundry and Wolfgang Windgassen’s comprehensive interpretation of the title-role, the 1951 performance somehow captures that sense of spiritual reawakening that was such a key aspect of Furtwängler’s Bayreuth Beethoven Ninth from the same year. Both documents must count among the greatest recorded performances of all time and Chris Bernauer’s transfers of the operas are superb. Peter Quantrill provides first-rate annotations.

Maximum contrast is provided by a superb five-disc set of Poulenc chamber music with **Alexandre Tharaud** as the mainstay pianist, which is recommended without reserve. Wondrous music, this, ranging from the masterly Sextet (wind quintet plus piano), through various solos, duo sonatas and trios – all superbly played (witness the *Élégie* for horn played by Hervé Joulain) – then vocal pieces and *The Story of Babar the Little Elephant* either in English as told by 13-year-old Natasha Emerson or in French by 12-year-old François Mouzaya, both performances vividly accompanied by Tharaud. I can’t conceive of a more affecting child’s entrée to the world of concert music than this,

the score a characteristic amalgam of gentle humour and bittersweetness, in other words pure Poulenc. It’s a gem of a set, very well recorded.

Another stylish exponent of French piano music, **Cécile Ousset**, has already enjoyed a CD celebration thanks to Eloquence, whose seven-disc collection of her Decca France recordings from the 1970s (ELQ482 7395) includes many gems, not least an all-French programme, as well as discs devoted to works by Rachmaninov and Schumann and Beethoven’s complete variations. Ousset’s Warner Classics trawl from roughly a decade later includes numerous concertos, many under Simon Rattle in Birmingham (both Ravel concertos, Liszt No 1, Saint-Saëns No 2, Rachmaninov No 2 and *Paganini* Rhapsody). Then there’s Prokofiev No 3 and Poulenc (Barshai), Grieg and Mendelssohn No 1 (Marriner), Rachmaninov No 3 (Herbig) and the B flat minor Sonata, and Schumann with Tchaikovsky No 1 (Masur). Both these and the solo selections exhibit Ousset’s sense of scale: both Chopin sonatas include their first-movement exposition repeats, the Third being especially impulsive. As Michael Oliver wrote (8/86) regarding Ousset’s Debussy *Préludes*: ‘Most of [her] recordings so far have been of music on the largest scale: Liszt, Rachmaninov, Mussorgsky, Prokofiev. She obviously feels no need to restrict her armoury of pianistic resource when approaching Debussy: her readings of the *Préludes* are generally big and dramatic, with the dynamics often marked up a degree, from *p* to *mf* and so on. She is at her most effective, therefore, in the more exuberant numbers.’ In the main I’d concur, though turn to a work such as Ravel’s *Miroirs* and Ousset’s ability to suggest widening tonal vistas (compare ‘Oiseaux tristes’ with ‘Une barque sur l’océan’) is striking. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

The Opera Edition Knappertsbusch

Decca Eloquence 19 ELQ484 1800

The Orchestral Edition Knappertsbusch

Decca Eloquence 18 ELQ484 1824

Poulenc Cpte Chamber Music Tharaud et al

Naxos 5 8 505258

The Complete Warner Recordings Ousset

Warner Classics 16 9029 64362-4

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



Vintage piano magic

A remarkable 1948 live recording of Reger's Piano Concerto by the work's dedicatee, **Frieda Kwast-Hodapp** (with the RIAS Symphony under Ewald Lindemann), who performed it some 50 times (11 of them under Reger's direction) offers the sort of gnarly grandeur that certain old-world pianists (Arrau, Backhaus, Casadesu) lavished on Brahms's B flat Concerto. In fact, Reger's masterpiece has much in common with Brahms's Second. Kwast-Hodapp's solo debut was in June 1897 as part of a memorial concert for Brahms, who had died two months earlier, and her way with big musical structures was on the evidence presented here formidable. The Reger is preceded on disc 2 of Melo Classic's revelatory double-pack by a RIAS studio recording of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* (also 1948), which, although occasionally smudged in terms of detail, features a richly emotional, even Schnabelian account of the *Adagio sostenuto*. Disc 1 consists of 18 of Scriabin's 24 Preludes, Op 11, miniatures by Reger and Fortner and a selection from both books of Bach's '48' (from Book 1, witness the driven, super-swift accounts of the C minor and D major Preludes, or the lavishly expressed E flat minor Prelude). And to think that Kwast-Hodapp only made one commercial disc recording (though there are some piano rolls), an Electrola 78 of works by Bach and Scarlatti.

Although **Julius Katchen** never reached Kwast-Hodapp's middle age (she was 69 when she died in 1949; Katchen just 42 when he passed away 20 years later), at least the gifted American left us numerous recordings, principally for Decca, though some live tapes survive, including the 'Piano Recitals 1946-1965' that appear on another recent Melo double-pack. Disc 1 opens with a deeply considered account of Beethoven's Op 26 Sonata, though the closing *Allegro* is extremely nimble. Op 109 is equally memorable, especially the rhapsodic first movement. Schubert's B flat Sonata features a first movement not dissimilar to Horowitz's at Carnegie



Frieda Kwast-Hodapp excels in Reger's Piano Concerto

Hall prior to his sabbatical, but come the *Andante sostenuto* and you can barely breathe: such intensity! The same set also includes a fiery live account of Schumann's *Études symphoniques* as well as memorable readings of Bach's Second Partita and various shorter works.

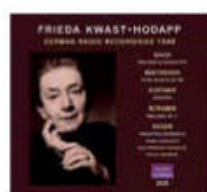
Another charismatic performance is Liszt's First *Mephisto Waltz*, which is especially propulsive in the hands of Budapest-born **Edith Farnadi**, playing that has a Cziffra-like demonism about it. The Gounod-Liszt *Faust* Waltz that follows is crisp and elegant, and there's a Chopin sequence, including a somewhat reckless *Fantaisie-impromptu* and a taut Second Scherzo, its opening an abrupt call to arms. One or two minor mishaps aside, it's both thrilling and thoughtful, as is the account of Brahms's Second Sonata that concludes the programme.

Years ago a recording of Chopin's First Concerto touted as being by Dinu Lipatti created quite a stir. A mistake, regrettably: what we actually heard – and a fair match for Lipatti, qualitatively speaking – was played by **Halina Czerny-Stefańska** in 1953 with the Czech Philharmonic. The error was rectified in 1980 and all was revealed. Other recordings of the concerto with Czerny-Stefańska include a 1971 version with the Berlin RSO under Rolf Kleinert, recently released by Melo. Here as before, poise and elastic phrasing are prominent virtues. The same desirable double-pack also includes dramatic accounts of Liszt's E flat Concerto from 1964 (Heinz Fricke), Grieg's A minor from 1962 (Otakar Trhlík) and Mendelssohn's G minor from 1963 (Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt). The deal is completed with stylishly performed solo pieces by Chopin, Rameau, Scarlatti and Roman Maciejewski.

The French pianist **Alfred Cortot** was a master in major Romantic piano works, especially by Chopin and Schumann. In the case of the former, one Cortot interpretation in particular stands out as exceptional: the Preludes, Op 28, four times recorded complete (1926, 1933-34, 1942 and 1957; all are in Warner's magnificent 'The Anniversary Edition' – 4/13), with an additional two versions of the 'Raindrop' Prelude (No 15) in 1950 and 1952. Pristine's admirably refurbished reissue of the wartime set, together with contemporaneous recordings of the *Études* (Opp 10 and 25) and Waltzes, usefully supplements the earlier versions, the 1933 set especially, which has so often been reissued elsewhere. All sound authoritatively improvised but the Preludes emerge as a single sweeping gesture, alternately impulsive, sad, joyful, tragic, angry, noble, impatient and ultimately sounding an intimidating death knell. The wartime set is possibly the most disquieting of all; and when it comes to No 15, the central *poco più animato* (1'28") with its repeated, raindrop-like A flats becomes darker still. As the section dies away Cortot rolls a prominently augmented bass line,

the effect rather like Beethoven's retreating storm in the *Pastoral* Symphony, something he also did in 1926 and the 1950s but less so in 1933-34, where that subtly augmented chorale sounds more like prayerful acknowledgement that the rain will soon pass. As to the *Études* and Waltzes, those who know Cortot's versions from the 1930s (not to mention single sides of individual pieces) will hear endless variations on the familiar in terms of rhythm, tempo, timing, dynamics, phrasing and so on. No pianist repays the process of comparing like with like as much as Alfred Cortot does.

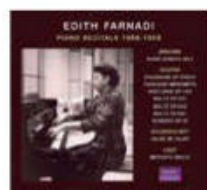
THE RECORDINGS



German Radio Recordings
1948 Kwast-Hodapp
Melo Classic ② MC1059
meloclassic.com



Piano Recitals 1946-1965
Katchen
Melo Classic ② MC1061



Piano Recitals 1966-1968
Farnadi
Melo Classic ② MC1066



Concert Tours in Germany
1958-1971 Czerny-Stefańska
Melo Classic ② MC1060



Chopin Preludes.
Études. Waltzes **Cortot**
Pristine Classical PAKM088
pristineclassical.com

David Oistrakh rarities

The mono 'near side' of the great David Oistrakh's discography (his early Russian recordings) tends to come and go on CD. In April 2009 I briefly covered a 20-disc set on Brilliant Classics (9056) that brought together various valuable sound documents including some of the mono material, Bach's G minor Sonata (Oistrakh's only recording of a complete Bach work for solo violin) having been a highlight. Biddulph opens its 'David Oistrakh: Recorded Rarities from Melodiya' with an excellent transfer of the same poised October 1947 performance. From the following year comes a heartfelt account of the lyrical and (in the finale) lively First Violin Sonata (1928) by the Soviet pianist and composer Zara Levina (grandmother of Alexander Melnikov). Between Bach and Levina is Medtner, his four-movement Third Violin

Sonata, *Epica* (all three quarters of an hours' worth) with Alexander Goldenweiser at the piano, recorded in 1959. Very Russian, this, and densely written, though go to 1'34" into the finale and Fauré unexpectedly springs to mind. Not an easy nut to crack but with Oistrakh and Goldenweiser on hand to do the honours you can certainly relish the music's very individual flavour. Excellent transfers by David Hermann and authoritative notes by Tully Potter.

THE RECORDING



Recorded Rarities from
Melodiya Oistrakh
Biddulph 85013-2

Fournier the violinist...

Violinist Jean Fournier, brother of cellist Pierre, was among the most refined players of his generation, especially in chamber music. The majority of Fournier's LP recordings were for the Westminster label, a highlight being the complete set of Beethoven sonatas recorded in the early 1950s with pianist Ginette Doyen, a strong player whose assertive style perfectly complements the quieter voice of her duo partner. Try by way of a sampling track the second movement of the *Spring* Sonata, a blend of elegance and expressive concentration, Fournier's initial assumption of the main theme sweet yet reserved. Then there's the *Adagio* from the A major Sonata, Op 30 No 1, as calm as the *Pastoral* Symphony's 'Scene by the Brook'. The darker-hued C minor never wants for tension, nor does the *Kreutzer* Sonata lack a sense of scale. Neither player pushes for maximum drama but opts instead for liveliness, intelligence and a keen response to the music's inherent poetry. Debussy plays straight into their hands with his whimsical late Sonata, which shares disc space with Fauré's two wonderful sonatas, the darker and more rarely heard E minor (No 2) coming off especially well.

A Kreisler programme is fascinating for the way Fournier approximates his great predecessor's vibrant tone, his slides too (try by way of examples the *Praeludium* and *Allegro in the Style of Pugnani* and the *Chanson Louis XIII* and *Pavane in the Style of Couperin* – note in particular the Kreislerian closing phrase of the *Chanson*). Piano trios by Haydn, Mozart, Schubert and Brahms feature pianist Paul Badura-Skoda and cellist Antonio Janigro, and the Fournier brothers play alongside pianist Jacques Février in Haydn's E flat Piano Trio, HobXV:29, recorded in Paris in

1937. We're also offered works by Mozart, Stravinsky, Suk, Bloch and Jean Martinon (Sonatina No 5 for solo violin), while there's a feisty Brahms Double Concerto with Janigro (under Hermann Scherchen) and two concertos by Mozart, Nos 3 and 5 (under Milan Horvat). Altogether a most rewarding collection, generally well transferred.

THE RECORDING

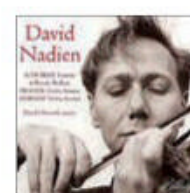


Beethoven. Mozart.
Haydn, etc J Fournier
Profil ⑩ PH22003

... and David Nadien

As a supremely gifted violinist, David Nadien is remembered largely for two roles that dominated his career: as Leonard Bernstein's concertmaster at the New York Philharmonic (1966-70; he actually made his first concert appearance with the Philharmonic at the age of 14) and as a session player who graced albums by Tony Bennett, Sinéad O'Connor, Bette Midler. Nadien's sound and overall approach recall the artistry of his idol Jascha Heifetz. The real rarities here are a couple of first-release Schubert recordings with pianist David Hancock, who takes a little time to settle, but once he does, from the Schubert Fantasy's *Allegretto*, he is fully on Nadien's wavelength for a performance that resembles Heifetz's with Brooks Smith (RCA), which has a rougher edge but is equally intense. The *Rondo brillant* emerges as both emotive (Nadien employs his fast vibrato to warming effect) and energetic, and here Hancock is alert to the zanier aspects of Schubert's piano-writing (ie from 6'03" into track 6). Franck's Sonata is sweeter still – quite gorgeous in fact, though the second-movement *Allegro* has plenty of muscle. In these players' hands Debussy's Sonata becomes an erotic *jeu d'esprit* and there are two seductive encores, Fauré's *Berceuse* and Ravel's *Pièce en forme de habanera*. A superb programme overall, then, and here's hoping that Biddulph can lay hands on more Nadien treasures. He was especially magical in *morceaux*, quite a few of which he set down on disc. The (stereo) recordings are excellent and so is the mastering.

THE RECORDING



Debussy. Franck. Schubert
Nadien
Biddulph 85012-2

Classics RECONSIDERED



Andrew Mellor and Richard Whitehouse

reappraise
Sakari Oramo's
2000 recording
of Sibelius's
Symphony No 4 with
the CBSO on Erato



Sibelius

Symphony No 4

CBSO / Sakari Oramo

Erato

With over 50 Sibelius Seconds in the catalogue, and three dozen of the Fourth, any newcomer has to work overtime to stand out in such a crush. This first release in Sakari Oramo's cycle deserves sustained attention – not least for its currently unique coupling of the heroic-nationalistic Second (1901) with the starkly magnificent Fourth completed a mere decade later (other such couplings are available only as part of complete cycles). Comparisons with Oramo's predecessor in Birmingham

(Sir Simon Rattle, 2/92) are highly illuminating, not least for a new, bigger sound, helped considerably by Erato's richer recording. Oramo's view of both works is broadly similar, for instance in the measured tempo for No 2's opening movement (following the majority line, whereas I rather prefer the swifter pace of Kajanus and [Neeme] Järvi). Oramo pulls and pushes the tempos throughout the Second, not always to the work's advantage, though this only becomes a problem towards the end of the second movement, where some momentum is lost, and at the final peroration where Oramo targets the gallery (but

overshoots), unlike the best of his rivals: Colin Davis, Vänskä, Ehrling and the Helsinki Berglund.

Oramo's reading of No 4 is more fluent and genuinely impressive. If not in the same league as Karajan (5/94) or Maazel (in 1968 – 2/97), and missing Vänskä's extraordinarily glacial quality (9/97; especially in the first and still astonishing third movements), it is more involving and better recorded than either Rattle or Sakari (3/00), fine as they are. Oramo also strikes the right balance at the close, between exhaustion and the enigmatic quality that so disconcerts audiences even now. **Guy Rickards** (7/01)

Andrew Mellor I'm guessing this recording has significance for both of us. Oramo's was my first Sibelius cycle, and it comes from your 'home' orchestra. Listening again to this Fourth, which has been so highly rated elsewhere, I am surprised at how gentle and beautiful so much of it sounds. The opening cello solo has a tenderness that goes intriguingly against ideas of this symphony as one of fear and foreboding, and yet we are still very much in desolate terrain. The finesse and depth of the sound, as noted by Guy Rickards in his original review, certainly helps.

Richard Whitehouse Yes, this was only Oramo's second recording with the CBSO (after a well-received Grieg miscellany), and when I interviewed him for *Gramophone* around this time, the conductor was cautious about embarking on a Sibelius cycle given that his predecessor, Sir Simon Rattle, had recorded one in the 1980s. The Fourth Symphony was its likely highlight, but it doesn't take overmuch listening to hear the qualitative difference in orchestral

playing – the CBSO having moved up to the first division in the interim. Recorded sound, courtesy of Symphony Hall, is also preferable for its spaciousness and detail – as GSR commented back then and you have above. Before we discuss aspects of the interpretation, I wonder how you view this as a coupling. Starting a Sibelius cycle with his two most strongly contrasted symphonies hadn't, as far as I'm aware, been done before and seems evidently a statement of intent in terms of where this partnership was heading.

AM I suspect the coupling was more about marketing – given that the Second was probably the best-known Sibelius symphony at the turn of the millennium (it was certainly the reason I bought the record). If there was some sense of stall-setting to it, perhaps it was in showing what the orchestra could do with the bright, outgoing D major of the Second against the very shadowy, introspective realm that Oramo finds in the Fourth. Among the distinctive features of this recording,

though, is that essential Sibelian sense of strain that Oramo finds towards the end of the Fourth, which duly anticipates the same feeling near the end of the Fifth. What do you hear as the most obvious distinguishing features of Oramo's Fourth?

RW I'd certainly agree that this coupling gives us the relative extremes of Sibelius's symphonism, but it's illuminating (albeit unintentionally so) in confirming what we knew by then: that the Fourth had come into its own interpretatively, whereas the once-ubiquitous Second had become fraught with difficulty through conductors becoming self-conscious in the face of its fervour and triumphalism – no longer able simply to 'go with' the rhetoric that pervades this music. Oramo doesn't fare badly in this respect (better, indeed, than Rattle did before him), but it's the inwardness and circumspection of the Fourth that really hits home. For me, its distinguishing feature is the quality and depth of string playing – through what Oramo has described as a balancing of individual freedom within collective



Through a balancing of individual freedom within collective responsibility, Oramo draws out quality string playing

responsibility, something he instilled into string sections at that time. As a violinist of professional standing, he was ideally placed to achieve this, and I don't think it an exaggeration to say that in the early 2000s the CBSO had the best string sound of any UK orchestra – which doesn't in itself make for a great interpretation, but it surely underpins the tonal finesse and sensitivity we both respond to in this account.

AM Perhaps the triumph of the string sound is that it's more substantial than Vänskä's 'glacial' Lahti SO sound referred to by GSR but has such subtlety of colour, as if seen through frosted glass – but that goes for the woodwinds too. That opening cello solo has a loneliness to it and yet it's so much more than shy or desolate, it's also tender. By the last movement, the strings exude this translucent lightness. Anyway, I think we agree on the string sound. How do you respond to Oramo's sense of the symphony's logic and architecture? For me, there is a very natural, fluent 'underlying tempo', and I appreciate the lack of unsanctioned accelerations or decelerations à la Paavo Berglund.

RW Berglund would no doubt have claimed such modifications to be the result of editorial amendments, but the consistency of Oramo's tempos is their own justification, notably in the first and third movements, each of which unfolds as though recorded in

a single take. A couple of details – the flutes' too deliberate phrasing in the scherzo's brief 'trio', and the slightly hesitant approach to the finale's climax (something that Oramo got absolutely right in his live cycle with the CBSO a few years later) – detract from an overall consistency that stands up well whatever the comparisons. Talking of which, GSR gave an extensive list of them (eight in all) as part of his review – several of them mainstays for this work, whatever the context. How do you reckon Oramo compares with some of these?

AM The sound is better than on almost all of them. That leaves us with the question of playing. Of course, technically, it's superior to quite a few on the list (for example Helsinki PO or Iceland SO), but when you get to the top-league central European orchestras there's a question about just what sort of sound you want in this work. Sibelius once said the Vienna Philharmonic sound was his ideal sound, but the context at the time of that comment was entirely different; I think the sound Oramo gets from his CBSO here – less upholstered, with a bit less fizz – works extremely well aesthetically. That said, I still love Berglund's more physical engagement, not least the way he roars into the tritone at the start of the piece, and there's surely a place for Herbert von Karajan in 1965 (DG) viewing the work as a grand but austere monument in marble.

RW Indeed there is, but I prefer Karajan's remake a decade later on EMI, where the Berlin strings have a colder and more translucent feel that couldn't be more appropriate for this piece. Otherwise, Lorin Maazel's Vienna account is comparable in the finesse of its string tone (it's worth remembering his own credentials as a violinist) and the clarity of sound that was demonstration standard in its day. That is most likely the sound that Sibelius had in mind when he made the comment you've referred to, even while Oramo is more emotionally involving overall. The game changer was Vänskä's Lahti recording, which gave a new perspective on this symphony at a time when it had come to the fore as a paradigm of musical modernism – hence Boulez's comment to the effect that he regretted not having performed it in Cleveland at George Szell's prompting. I recall BBC Radio 3's *Building a Library* putting Oramo second to Vänskä soon after the

former had been issued, but the most recent comparison back in 2015 saw Oramo come out on top.

AM That's true and, as far as I remember, the 2015 survey was quite taken with how Oramo had that initial tritone establishing the necessary tension for the whole symphony. Perhaps that's connected to the idea that a conductor needs to shape the symphonic riverbed in Sibelius – literally and figuratively, at the bottom of the orchestra – so as to get the flow of 'liquid' momentum above it to sound convincingly gravitational. It's more obvious in the surrounding symphonies, but Oramo proves it's a design characteristic well worth thinking about here too. I'm very happy to have been reminded of this recording's qualities. Where would you put it in the pecking order?

RW Pretty near the top. I'd still opt for Vänskä's Lahti version as first choice and wouldn't want to be without either Colin Davis's Boston and Maazel's Vienna accounts or, further back, those by Sir Thomas Beecham and Arturo Toscanini. Taken overall, however, Oramo's reading stands easily in this company – a tribute to its conviction as an interpretation, the quality of its playing and the excellence of its recording. I hope there'll be another Sibelius traversal with the BBCSO, but in this symphony at least, Oramo's Fourth with the CBSO is a tough act to follow. **G**

Books



Richard Whitehouse reads about Elliott Carter's late music:

'Carter's "late-late" works, from around 1995, distil his preoccupations towards a peak of subtlety and refinement'



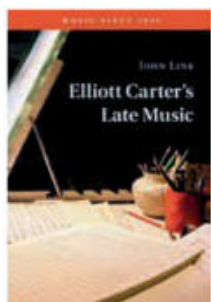
Tim Ashley enjoys a stimulating study of a troubled relationship:

'Emma, faced with Debussy's relentless demands for solitude in which to compose, became increasingly jealous of his music'

Elliott Carter's Late Music

By John Link

Cambridge University Press, HB, 484pp, £105
ISBN 978-0-521-76976-1



It hardly seems almost a decade since the death of Elliott Carter, at the age of 103 and active

as a composer until his final few weeks. Although his work did not endure a major decline in performances (compared with, say, Tippett or Lutosławski), the temporal extent of his output has militated against any balanced overview such as John Link – whose involvement with this music stretches back across several decades – is ideally equipped to provide, whether in terms of a technical analysis or, moreover, the consideration of precisely what Carter's legacy represents.

'Late Music' needs to be clarified. Specifically, this is a study of what has become known as Carter's 'late-late' period, which began around 1995 and continued for the next 17 years. While it involved no fundamental change of aesthetic stance, it did bring a notable simplification of working practice and compositional craft to the extent that almost half of Carter's works emerged during this time. The longest of these pieces is under 40 minutes, the majority less than half that duration, and their streamlined conception is never to the detriment of musical substance or emotional density. Rather, they distil Carter's preoccupations towards a peak of subtlety and refinement – his instrumental music even more lucid in its abstractions, with his vocal music placing comparable emphasis on expressive poise through its articulation of the poetic text.

Initial chapters on Carter's life and methodology are followed by discussions of every piece, grouped according to category, that come under this 'late-late' heading. These vary in terms of extensiveness and technical detail, yet even the more elaborate

are never merely abstruse – so that readers with only a cursory appreciation of 'all-interval tetrachords' or 'derived core harmonies' will find such terms merge into a more nuanced assessment of the work at hand. Musicologist as Link may be, his approach is never addressed solely to his academic peers.

Two discussions might be taken to be representative of this study overall. First, that of the Fifth String Quartet (1995), because it was the piece that ushered in Carter's final period, both in terms of technical lucidity and, of greater significance for what followed, its typically deft posing of what constituted a modernist statement in an era that left such considerations behind; this from a composer who lived long enough to view such matters dispassionately or often ironically. Hence the interaction between what this music is with what its realisation might be, to the extent that its reception takes on a vitality equal to and maybe even greater than its content. Carter's later music often casts specific instruments as protagonists in an abstract drama: now that drama was being extended to encompass listeners as 'willing' participants.

The other keynote discussion is on Carter's only opera, *What Next?* (1997). Equivocally received at early hearings, its main attribute is to convey by theatrical means the essence of Carter's later concerns. Link (rightly) implies that what this opera is about matters less than what its characters try to find out about their role, or purpose, in a drama of which they have little understanding and which might not have its basis in concrete reality. As with this opera so with Carter's late music, and so with Western society on the cusp of the new millennium.

Consideration proceeds according to genre, with pride of place necessarily being allotted to those song-cycles of Carter's final 15 years. Setting predominantly American poets from the early or mid-20th century, they find the composer revisiting authors he had first encountered decades before. He reassesses them in often combative though always empathetic

terms as the touchstone of that creative endeavour from which Carter emerged and to which, as he neared his own century, he still aspired. Here again one finds him reacting to and often confronting these authors; variously acknowledging their wisdom or berating their recklessness in music whose emotional acuity and compassion can hardly be denied. It is here that Carter's potent contribution to Western musical culture is experienced at its most immediate and profound.

Stylishly presented with its copious music examples and explanatory tables, Link's volume is ideal for those who, having read David Schiff's *Elliott Carter* in the Master Musicians series (OUP, 12/18) and his study of those works up to the mid-1990s in *The Music of Elliott Carter* (Faber, 12/98), wish to extend and broaden their appreciation of a composer who – through to the pathos of *Instances* and the capriciousness of *Epigrams* (both 2012) – wrote methodically and without fear of the 'ending' that has to arrive irrespective of any individual's longevity.

Elliott Carter's Late Music makes for absorbing, frequently demanding but always rewarding reading and is more than sufficient reason, as Link himself suggests, 'to experience Carter's music yourself – to listen, to recognise and respond to its humanity, and to take it to heart'.

Richard Whitehouse

Emma & Claude Debussy

The Biography of a Relationship

By Gillian Opstad

Boydell Press, HB, 408pp, £40
ISBN 978-1-783-27658-5



Gillian Opstad's original intention, she tells us in the acknowledgements for this book, was to write a life of Debussy's wife Emma, until a commentator on her first draft suggested that even after his death, 'it was Emma's relationship with



Claude and Emma Debussy: a new biography adds greatly to our understanding of an often fraught relationship

him that defined her life, and therefore the book was, in effect, a biography of that relationship'. What she actually gives us is a challenging, detailed study of a difficult subject: challenging because Opstad more than once questions assumptions about Debussy's own biography; difficult because there are gaps in our knowledge of Emma herself.

She was born Emma Moyse, in July 1862, into a Jewish mercantile family from Bordeaux, but we know little about her until after her marriage to Sigismond Bardac, a Russian-born banker, in 1879. He collected art and had liaisons with actresses; she established herself as a singer and hostess of a Parisian salon frequented by Fauré, who taught music to the Bardacs' son Raoul, and eventually became Emma's lover. Whether Fauré was the father of her daughter Hélène, the Dolly (her nickname) of his Suite, has been debated but never proved.

Her first meeting with Debussy is usually dated to October 1903, when Raoul, now his composition pupil, invited him with his wife Lilly to dinner with Emma, though Opstad, examining Raoul's letters, argues they may have known each other as early as March 1902. The narrative of their deepening relationship, their flight

to Pourville in 1904 and Lilly's attempted suicide is familiar, but Opstad's analysis of the anti-Semitism, frequently played down, that accompanied the resulting scandal is brilliant and significant: Debussy was accused not only of abominable behaviour towards Lilly but also of abandoning her for stereotypically perceived Jewish wealth, when Emma, in fact, had little money of her own.

They married in 1908, primarily, Opstad argues, to legitimise their daughter Chouchou, born in 1905. Their relationship, however, was fraught with conflict. As on previous occasions, Debussy felt creatively stifled, complaining in letters to colleagues and friends that 'I am definitely not made for domestic life', and that 'the family ... gets in the way either with too much tenderness or with blind serenity'. Emma, faced with relentless demands for solitude in which to compose, became increasingly jealous of his music. Money worries wore them down, and both were repeatedly ill, Emma with liver trouble, Debussy with depression and the onset of the cancer that eventually claimed his life.

In 1910 Emma reluctantly considered divorce. 'It would cause me so much anguish to separate from the man who

causes me so much suffering,' she told her solicitor. 'Alas, there will never be a shortage of reasons to do so.' One possible cause of the crisis, albeit based on shadowy evidence, was that Debussy was developing a sexual interest in Dolly, then 18. It took a temporary separation from Emma during a trip to Vienna and Budapest to make him realise how much he missed her. 'Often when I talk to you it's not you I am addressing directly,' he told her, 'but it's another me whom I can question and who replies as if it is my own thoughts speaking' – a revealing insight both into what she had to put up with and how dependent on her he really was. After that, there was no further question of separation, though the tensions between them remained.

Emma's last years were desperately sad. Her grief at Debussy's death in 1918 was compounded by her devastation when Chouchou died from diphtheria the following year. She

campaigns for monuments to be erected in his memory, and oversaw the completion, publication and performance of unfinished or early works, only to be castigated for unearthing supposedly inferior material. Manuel de Falla, a friend since 1907, was among the few who remained loyal. One of her last wishes was to hear Debussy's String Quartet once more: the Quatuor Calvet played it for her in her apartment shortly before her death in 1934.

Opstad largely avoids discussion of Debussy's music but tells us much about the background to many of his works. Her examination, for example, of Debussy's friendship with Gabriele D'Annunzio and the history of *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien* is more thorough than in any biography of either man that I know. And her analysis of Debussy's obsession with *La chute de la maison Usher*, and his inability to complete it, as symptomatic of depression is among the most persuasive accounts of its genesis to date. Above all, though, this is a moving and exacting study of his relationship with the woman who ultimately stood by him for the last 16 years of his life, and as such adds immeasurably to our understanding of them both.

Tim Ashley

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Tchaikovsky's 'Pathétique' Symphony

The enigmatic masterwork of Tchaikovsky's final days remains open to a wide range of interpretations. **Andrew Farach-Colton** hears how it has been approached on recordings dating back almost a century

Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony carries with it an inordinate amount of baggage – and no wonder, for just eight days after conducting the premiere the composer died in circumstances that remain a mystery. We know he had a programme for the work, but he only hinted at what that musical narrative entailed, leading several generations of scholars to posit wildly different theories. In recent years, for example, Timothy L Jackson has argued that the programme is tied to Tchaikovsky's homosexuality, while Marina Ritzarev concluded that the *Pathétique* illustrates the Passion of Christ in symphonic form.

Of course, the true test of these theories depends not only upon extramusical evidence but on whether they adhere to the letter of the score, and much the same can be said for performances. Listening to four or five dozen recordings of the *Pathétique* within the course of a few months, I was distressed to find that a majority of conductors are reluctant to trust what's printed on the page. Perhaps they take the view that Tchaikovsky was a melodist first and a symphonist second, so his structures are malleable or require some sort of remedy (in the way it was thought that Schumann's orchestration needed fixing). This couldn't be further from the truth, for not only is the structure of the Sixth absolutely ingenious – with two vivid set pieces (a Waltz in 5/4 time and a March) coming between the epic drama of the first movement and a pithy but potent *Adagio* finale – but the score is as detailed in its directions as any of Mahler's. (Mahler greatly admired the *Pathétique*, in fact, and it could be argued that he might not have composed his own Sixth Symphony without Tchaikovsky's Sixth as a model). So, for example, not only does Tchaikovsky

carefully indicate every tempo change and where to use rubato, but in addition he lays out a clear hierarchy of dynamic markings that, if followed, makes the symphony's dramatic shape crystal clear.

I want a performance of the Sixth to be dramatic, poetic and imaginative, certainly, but also to take Tchaikovsky at his word. I have two key tests of a faithful interpretation – key, because they greatly affect the work's structure. The first comes at the end of the opening movement's feverish development section where, after a desperate battle with swirling strings and vehement calls to arms in the brass, the music sputters momentarily and then – with no marked change in tempo – the strings dig in their heels with long, sustained notes to which the winds and brass gradually add their plangent voices. This culminates in a crushing chord marked *ffff*, the loudest dynamic marking in the entire symphony and thus the movement's intended climax. The second test is whether, in the finale, the consolatory D major theme, marked *Andante*, is taken at a more flowing tempo than the opening *Adagio lamentoso*. I was rather shocked by how many conductors failed at least one of these tests.

IN THE ELECTRICAL ERA

A few complete (and nearly complete) versions of the *Pathétique* were made in the acoustic era but the first shellac set to do the score's sound world any justice was **Albert Coates's** 1926 electrical recording, a stupendous performance in many ways. Coates makes the battle in the first movement's development section, played with ferocious abandon by the LSO, seem a matter of life or death. He does slam on the brakes at the shift to long-held notes (at 11'55"), but at least he doesn't have the timpani disregard

Tchaikovsky's diminuendo and roar with a crescendo into the slower-moving passage as so many others do. And despite the sudden loss of momentum, Coates coaxes a proper *fortississimo* death blow, properly placing the movement's climax. The inner movements are delightfully characterised – particularly the charming ungainliness of the lopsided Waltz – and although the devotional *Andante* section of the finale is in more or less the same tempo as the opening *Adagio*, the sentiment feels right.

It's a pity that **Oskar Fried's** live (!) 1932 recording with the RPO seems to have flown under the radar, as I find his interpretation far more cogent than **Serge Koussevitzky's** or **Willem Mengelberg's**. In Fried's hands, the first movement's development section gathers tremendous emotional weight as it unfolds, and he doesn't pump the brakes when the rhythms are elongated – or, at least, he tries not to, as some rough ensemble suggests that the RPO were quite used to halving the tempo here. Koussevitzky (from 1930) is marvellous in the inner movements. The Boston Symphony's cellos sing their off-balance Waltz with an emotionally engaging *cantabile*, and the third-movement March is exciting, taut and very well played. But both he and Mengelberg (in 1937 and again in 1941 – now on Naxos) push and pull the tempos about in the first movement to the point that it's rendered episodic. Still, even if he makes free with the text, Mengelberg is memorably persuasive in the finale (particularly in 1937), where he unleashes a juggernaut of devastation.

A PRE-WAR TRIUMVIRATE

I have a special place in my heart for **Wilhelm Furtwängler's** 1938 studio recording as it was my introduction to that conductor's art, and I clearly



Tchaikovsky in 1893, the year in which he died - just eight days after conducting the premiere of his Sixth Symphony



Pletnev directs an inspired and articulate performance in 1991 with the Russian National Orchestra

remember the eureka moment of hearing the long-breathed way he has the Berlin Philharmonic's strings phrase the first movement's lyrical second theme. Like Koussevitzky and Mengelberg, Furtwängler's approach to tempo is flexible, yet it feels natural to me in a way that the others don't. Admittedly, there's more passionate spontaneity in his live recording from Cairo in 1951 (DG, 5/76, 8/03), and he shapes the first movement more decisively there, too – the *ffff* climax is more an obliterating implosion than an explosion – but I find him to be an especially eloquent narrator and tone-painter in the studio performance. I love the way he colours the first movement's coda with sunlight glinting through the smoky remains of a disaster while the

symphony's hero limps away, the emotional fragility with which he imbues the second movement's central Trio section and the quality of noble, Shakespearean tragedy he brings to the finale.

There's naturalness in the ebb and flow of **Arturo Toscanini's** 1942 recording with the Philadelphia Orchestra, as well as a similar wealth of picturesque detail, although the performance has an urgency and bite that puts more of the emphasis on dramatic incident. He places the first movement's climax unerringly, and his coda displays a wounded pride that's as affecting in its own way as Furtwängler's. In the finale, the strings' luxuriously swooping portamento – oh so *lamentoso* here – reminds us that the Philadelphia had recently been **Leopold Stokowski's**

orchestra. Funnily enough, Stoki recorded the Sixth with Toscanini's NBC Symphony just two years later. Stoki's is a highly imaginative reading, as one would expect. I like the way he makes the outer sections of the second movement sound tipsy, setting the obsessive hand-wringing of the Trio in stark relief. I don't like the small cut he makes in the March, however, nor the way he doctors the score in the finale to double the violins at the octave at 6'23" – a glimmer of Hollywood glitz and sentimentality that's quite out of place.

FOUR FAITHFUL FROM THE '50S

Turning from the extravagances of Stokowski to a quartet of steadfast interpretations from the 1950s is something of a relief. **Paul van Kempen**, in 1951, draws one into the narrative instantly with a richly atmospheric introduction. Indeed, although he maintains relatively steady tempos, the Concertgebouw play with the same kind of character and commitment they did for Mengelberg. Listen to the wall of sound the orchestra throw up at 12'53" (as if they're barricading the door) before the climactic chord; or, in the March, to the spring in their collective step, and at quite a leisurely tempo at that. Most impressive of all, perhaps, is how the finale is built from phrases that have the visceral impact of bodily gestures.

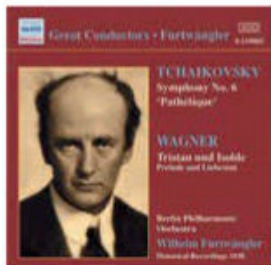
Pierre Monteux's 1955 RCA recording has similar qualities to van Kempen's but in superb stereo sound, the Boston Symphony's ensemble tighter even than the Concertgebouw's. Monteux brings out the balletic aspects of the score, not just in the two inner movements but in the first movement's *Allegro non troppo* as well. When Tchaikovsky writes *incalzando* ('pressing on') in the lyrical second theme (at 4'40"), Monteux does just that, and his rubato is miraculously unselfconscious. Then, in the finale, he manages to find a middle ground between Furtwängler's nobility and Toscanini's dramatic fervour.

A MOST POETIC PATHÉTIQUE

BPO / Wilhelm Furtwängler (1938)

Naxos 8 110865

Furtwängler's mastery of the art of transition pays off in spades in his 1938 recording, where the work's stark juxtapositions fit together seamlessly in a performance that eschews



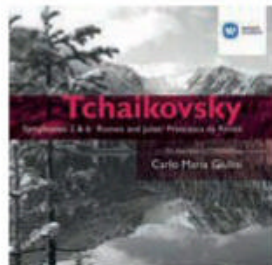
theatrics yet arouses profound emotion (the very definition of *pathétique*) through patient phrasing and vivid, thoughtful characterisation.

IRON FIST IN A SILK GLOVE

Philh Orch / Carlo Maria Giulini (1959)

Warner Classics ② 586531-2

Giulini's 1959 recording is hard-hitting, and the climaxes register with considerable force. At the same time, however, there's a consistent lyrical impetus (born, perhaps, from the



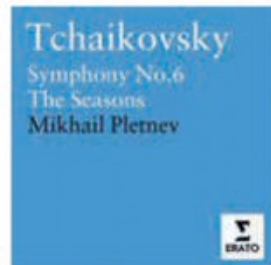
conductor's background in Italian opera houses) aided in large part by the elegant, graceful playing of the Philharmonia in their early stereo-era prime.

VIRTUOSO CON FUOCO

Russian Nat Orch / Mikhail Pletnev (1991)

Erato 561636-2

Hard to believe the RNO were barely a year old when they recorded this scorcher of a *Pathétique* under Pletnev (his conducting debut on disc), and they play with an



articulateness and virtuoso abandon that's much like Pletnev's pianism, igniting a frisson that recalls Mravinsky's legendary recordings.

For an instructive counterpoint to Monteux's Gallic grace, there's **Carlo Maria Giulini's** incisive yet poetic 1959 Philharmonia recording (also in excellent stereo). Giulini is especially attentive to the score's extraordinary dynamic range. The hush with which he begins the first movement's second theme is quite literally breathtaking, yet he can hit hard when required, although he does so with a silk glove. Note, too, the refreshing coolness of that first movement's coda, which is oddly full of possibility, as if Tchaikovsky had placed a 'once upon a time' at the end of the movement instead of at the beginning. The second movement sings, even in the tiniest grace notes, and the third movement is exceptionally light and articulate – almost Mendelssohnian in the opening minutes. The conductor's 1980 remake with the Los Angeles Philharmonic (DG, 10/81, 4/83) seems wan in comparison.

I'll also take **Ferenc Fricsay's** 1953 recording of the Sixth over his 1959 stereo redo (DG, A/03). Yes, the sonic clarity of the latter recording is a huge plus, but the structural lucidity and musical fidelity of the mono account is far superior. It must be said that while the Berlin RSO play brilliantly for Fricsay in 1959, the Berlin Philharmonic (in 1953 still very much Furtwängler's orchestra) are finer still. The first movement's climax in the earlier recording is positively cataclysmic, with a *ffff* chord worthy of the hammer-blows in Mahler's Sixth. The March packs a wallop, too. Although it begins in a festive mood, its energy becomes increasingly unnerving to a point at which, in the final minutes, I sense a hint of violence. I do wish Fricsay wasn't quite so resigned so early on in the finale, ignoring the coda's expressive *fortissimo* and *sforzando* accent markings, but this (and a few other textual alterations) can't blunt this *Pathétique's* considerable force.

SLAVIC SOUL

There are those, like the late (and much-missed) Edward Greenfield, who insist that **Yevgeny Mravinsky's** 1960 recording of the *Pathétique* is, as EG put it, 'a caricature' of his searing 1956 account (DG, 2/57). And he had a point. There's a sense in the latter version that Mravinsky is showing us the emotional volume can 'go to 11' (in the immortal words of Nigel Tufnel from *This is Spinal Tap*). And yet this intensity – enhanced by shallow, in-your-face early stereo sound – is utterly gripping from start to finish. Never mind that he alters the marked dynamics in the first movement's development; the Leningrad Philharmonic's white-hot music-making



Furtwängler delivers a masterly, seamless performance in 1938 with the Berlin Philharmonic

silences niggling criticism. So does the fact that there's a wealth of delicacy: the same movement's coda has marvellous vulnerability, for instance; the horns at 1'03" in the 5/4 Waltz coo like birds; and the March is feather-light in the first half, although, like Fricsay, it comes close to violence near the end. The finale flows in long phrases, and there's no fat here;

Mravinsky makes every note count. All in all, it's an interpretation whose legendary status is justified.

I've had **Igor Markevitch's** Philips recording in my library since my university days but hadn't heard it in many years. Returning to it now, I had high expectations and, I'm sad to say, was a little disappointed. There's some sour intonation

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1926/27 LSO / Albert Coates	Pristine Classical PASC301 (4/27 ^R)
1930 Boston SO / Serge Koussevitzky	Pristine Classical PASC422 (4/31 ^R , 3/93 ^R)
1932 RPO / Oskar Fried	Dante Lys LYS200
1937 Concertgebouw Orch / Willem Mengelberg	Pristine Classical ② PASC624 (9/89 ^R , 10/94 ^R)
1938 BPO / Wilhelm Furtwängler	Naxos 8 110865 (1/39 ^R , 3/04); Warner (55 discs) 9029 52324-0 (11/21)
1942 Philadelphia Orch / Arturo Toscanini	RCA GD60328 (6/91)
1944 NBC SO / Leopold Stokowski	Pristine Classical PASC531 (9/18)
1951 Concertgebouw Orch / Paul van Kempen	Decca Eloquence ② ELQ480 8536; ⑩ ELQ484 0237 (1/55 ^R , 6/20)
1953 BPO / Ferenc Fricsay	DG 445 409-2GDO (2/55 ^R , 11/94)
1955 Boston SO / Pierre Monteux	RCA ⑧ 82876 61397-2; ⑧ 19075 81634-2; (40 discs) 88843 07348-2 (2/57 ^R , 1/15)
1959 Philh Orch / Carlo Maria Giulini	EMI/Warner ② 586531-2 (8/05); ⑦ 993739-2 (4/61 ^R , 5/14)
1960 Leningrad PO / Yevgeny Mravinsky	DG ② 477 591GOR2 (11/61 ^R , 8/87 ^R)
1962 LSO / Igor Markevitch	Philips ② 438 335-2PM2 (2/94); Decca Eloquence (26 discs) ELQ484 1744 (10/62 ^R , 1/22)
1964 BPO / Herbert von Karajan	DG ⑧ 463 774-2GB8 (10/64 ^R , 12/00)
1965 Moscow PO / Kirill Kondrashin	Melodiya MELCD100 0956; Profil ⑬ PH18046 (5/19)
1986 New York PO / Leonard Bernstein	DG 419 604-2GH (5/87);
1991 Russian Nat Orch / Mikhail Pletnev	Virgin/Erato 561636-2 (1/92 ^R)
2013 Bavarian RSO / Mariss Jansons	BR-Klassik 900123 (8/14)
2015 MusicAeterna / Teodor Currentzis	Sony Classical 88985 40435-2 (1/18)
2015 Czech PO / Semyon Bychkov	Decca 483 0656DH (10/16); ⑦ 483 4942DX7 (10/19)
2017 BPO / K Petrenko	Berliner Philharmoniker BPHR190261 (7/19); ⑦ BPHR200351 (1/21)



Karajan's 1964 Berlin performance reveals careful attention to detail, while his ability to convey raptness pays off in the outer movements' lyrical passages

from the LSO, the March starts well but becomes stodgy, and his overall attention to dynamics leaves a lot to be desired – surely the cellos in the second movement are louder than *mezzo-forte*, the gong-stroke in the finale is *forte* rather than *piano*, and yet the strings in the coda sound wan rather than agonised.

The Moscow Philharmonic's cellos sound larger than life in the sepulchral acoustic of **Kirill Kondrashin's** 1965 Melodiya recording, but this is, in its own way, as impressive an interpretation as Mravinsky's. The phrasing in the first movement's *Allegro non troppo* is beautifully dovetailed, the development begins with gut-punches and ends with a piling on of woe. And despite the outsized cellos in the Waltz (or perhaps aided by them?), the shift to the Trio feels cinematic, like going from an outdoor scene to something more interior and psychological. But it's the finale where Kondrashin hits the hardest – even the silences crackle with emotion – especially at the end, where the muted violins cry out in anguish, making the extent of the tragedy devastatingly clear.

A BIG-LEAGUE PAIR

Rob Cowan surveyed **Herbert von Karajan's** half-dozen recordings of the Sixth not too long ago (1/08), and I agree wholeheartedly that the conductor's 1964 Berlin recording

is the most successful. In fact, it's a beautiful, cultivated performance, and one that gets the symphony's proportions exactly right. What makes it special is Karajan's attention to detail – the wealth of colour revealed by his attention to inner voices, for instance – as well as his magical ability to convey raptness, which pays off big time in the lyrical passages of the outer movements.

There are extraordinary moments, too, in the last and most (in)famous of **Leonard Bernstein's** recordings of the *Pathétique*, recorded live in New York in 1986. After a world-weary introduction, his broadly paced *Allegro non troppo* indicates that he'll be painting on a huge canvas, and he does so most vividly for the first three movements. I love how distant the clarinet sounds before the first-movement coda – like a dream that's painfully out of reach – and no other version I've heard casts so many ominous shadows over the third-movement March. It's the indulgently slow finale that spoils it for me. Bernstein was capable of magical music-making, there's no doubt, but even his wizardry doesn't allow the movement's through-line to be sustained at such a marmoreal tempo.

CRITICS' FAVOURITES

The Oslo Philharmonic recorded the first Tchaikovsky symphony cycle of the

digital era for Chandos, winning raves in the pages of this magazine and bringing wider recognition to both the orchestra and its conductor, **Mariss Jansons**. Hearing it in this wider context, their account of the Sixth (recorded the same year as Bernstein's – 1/87) is impressively clear-headed and tidy but not especially individual. Jansons recorded the Sixth again in 2013 with the Bavarian RSO, giving stronger shape to the overall structure and investing nearly every phrase and section with vibrance and character. He certainly digs deeper in the first-movement development, and the struggle displays not just blood, sweat and tears but sinew and muscle. The March is (thankfully) played in 4/4, as written, not two beats to a bar, as it was in Oslo. In both accounts Jansons takes the devotional *Andante* section of the finale slightly slower than the *Adagio* opening, rather than faster, but the way he makes the *pianissimos* sound like whispers around a deathbed in the 2013 recording is a memorable touch.

The 1991 debut disc by the then newly formed Russian National Orchestra also garnered abundant praise in *Gramophone* and elsewhere, and with good reason.

Mikhail Pletnev (in his recorded conducting debut) directs an inspired and exceptionally articulate performance – and one that's quite faithful to the score. After a ghostly



Kirill Petrenko's 2017 recording, again with the Berliners, is faithful to the letter of Tchaikovsky's score

Allegro non troppo, the lyrical theme ushers us into a whole new world, then the development seems to be drawn by gravitational pull to the overwhelming *ffff* climax. By leaning into the small but crucial dissonances in the second movement's Trio, Pletnev anticipates the anguish of the finale. The March, meanwhile, is akin to a manic episode, and there's cathartic sincerity in the *Adagio lamentoso*.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

I wish space had allowed me to include Guido Cantelli's darkly sober 1952 recording with the Philharmonia (EMI/Warner, 4/79), Václav Talich's similarly dusky 1953 account with the Czech Philharmonic (Supraphon, 7/77) and Riccardo Muti's 1979 trenchant Philharmonia account (EMI/Warner, 1/89), with its woozy trombone threnody in the finale, as if the low brass were reeling from a blow to the head. And I feel particularly badly to have omitted more recent and quite excellent performances by Vladimir Jurowski (LPO, 11/09), Yannick Nézet-Séguin with the Rotterdam Phil (DG, 12/13) and Vasily Petrenko with the RLPO (Onyx, 3/17).

Several older recordings either never made it to digital format or have been deleted but are worth searching out, particularly those by Nicolai Malko (HMV,

11/47) and Paul Kletzki (HMV, 11/61), both with the Philharmonia. And because black conductors continue to struggle for recognition, I must mention Dean Dixon with the Cologne RSO (Oriole, 3/64) and Henry Lewis with the RPO (Decca, 7/69). Both deserve credit for forgoing histrionics and taking Tchaikovsky largely at his word.

FIDELITY AND GALL

Three recordings from the past decade are exceptional. The first, by **Teodor Currentzis** with MusicAeterna (2015), stands out because it's controversial. I'll admit I was bowled over by the sheer gutsiness of his orchestra's playing when I first heard it. My enthusiasm quickly waned, however, for instead of trusting the score and trying to fit its puzzle pieces together, Currentzis more or less rewrites it, adding or altering articulation and dynamic markings right and left. Everything is played for maximum effect, and the result is akin to hearing the Sixth in the aural equivalent of a funhouse mirror. Try the first movement's *Allegro non troppo*, where he throws in a series of echo effects, as if what Tchaikovsky wrote wasn't interesting enough and needed pizzazz (cue Broadway 'jazz hands'). Sure, the March is clear and clean enough but it ultimately comes across as a virtuoso display piece in a performance that reveals more about Currentzis than Tchaikovsky.

The power of the *Pathétique* when Tchaikovsky's instructions are followed to the letter is demonstrated by two of the most faithful ever committed to disc. **Semyon Bychkov**, also issued in 2015, finds a world of poetry in the score. He doesn't push the first-movement development too fast yet really captures its fight-or-flight character, and it moves as if pulled by the inexorable undertow of an ocean wave, finally crashing at the *ffff* chord. His Waltz is elegantly wistful, the March – which goes from Mendelssohnian airiness to overbearing military swagger – is greatly enhanced by antiphonal violins, and he gets the tempo relationships exactly right in the finale without sacrificing an ounce of pain or passion. Maybe the Czech Philharmonic winds aren't as characterful today as they were in the 1950s for Talich but the orchestra's dark, burnished tone is still a wonder in itself.

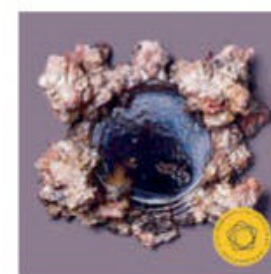
Bychkov's is a performance I'd be happy to live with, for sure, but forced to pick just one recording of the Sixth, it would have to be **Kirill Petrenko's** from 2017 (his first recording as music director of the Berlin Philharmonic). Like Bychkov, Petrenko has considered every one of Tchaikovsky's markings and – *mirabile dictu* – he makes sense of them all. More than any other conductor I've heard, he demonstrates beyond a shadow of a doubt that the composer knew exactly what he wanted. Not only that but his recording brings together the best qualities of some of my other favourites – Furtwängler's long-breathed phrasing, Monteux's balletic grace, Giulini's fierce nobility and Pletnev's articulate power. It also happens to be flawlessly played and recorded with stunning transparency. Some may want even more thrills and chills – though I think Petrenko offers plenty – but I believe that by being so faithful to the letter of the score, he gets us as close as possible to that enigmatic programme Tchaikovsky had in mind. How could I ask for anything more? 🎧

HIGHEST FIDELITY

BPO / Kirill Petrenko (2017)

Berliner Philharmoniker BPHR190261

Kirill Petrenko is faithful to Tchaikovsky's score in its minutest detail, and he uses this focus to build a performance that's as characterful as it is coherent. Played to



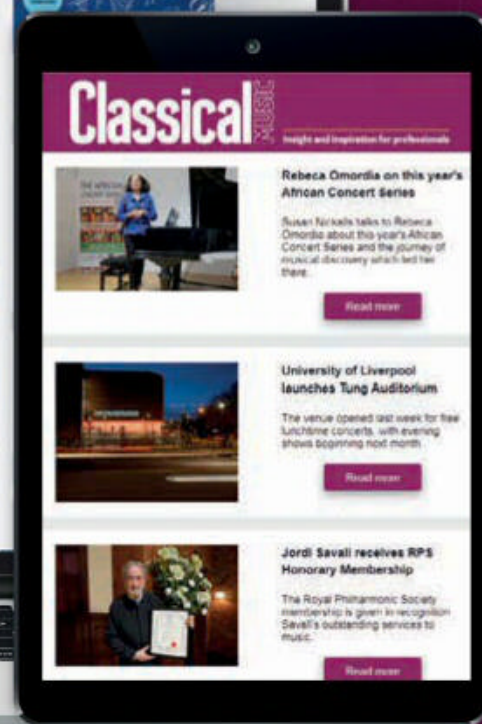
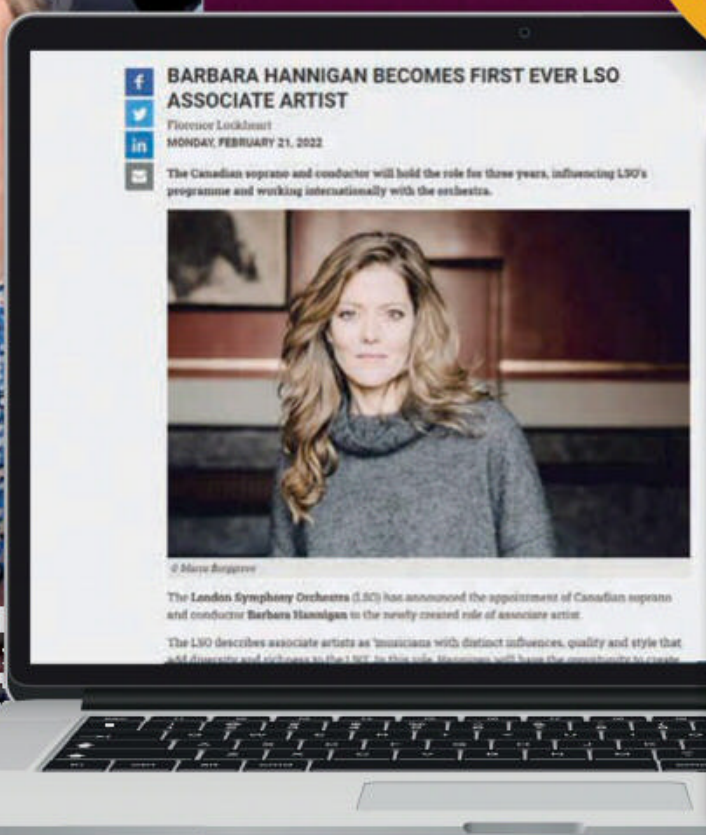
the hilt by the Berlin Philharmonic and recorded in sound that gives new meaning to 'high fidelity', it's truly a performance to live with.

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THIS MONTH

An accomplished all-in-one system from a well-known name and all you need to know to buy an affordable turntable for LP collections old or new.

Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

JULY TEST DISCS



Mitsuko Uchida's account of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* isn't just a dazzling experience; it's also delivered with superb sound, recorded at Snape Maltings.



A glorious richness sets apart this generous and captivating recital of French pieces for cello and orchestra performed by Marc Coppey on Audite.

● ESSAY

Back to Britain

The announcement that the revived Mission 770 speakers will be made in Cambridgeshire shows the company's overseas owners investing in British hi-fi manufacturing, boosting the indigenous industry

Just for once, those who bemoan the 'selling out' of great British hi-fi names to manufacturing in lower-cost countries may have been silenced.

Announcing its revival – or perhaps reimagining – of one of the classic 1970s loudspeaker designs, the Mission 770, owner IAG also passed on the information that the new model would be made not in its huge facility in China but back home in Britain. Not only is the new model British-designed – courtesy of IAG's Director of Acoustic Design, Peter Comeau – but it's also being built in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, which is both the original home of the Mission brand and the site of the current owner's UK HQ.

And it's not just the Mission speakers coming home, although they're the first beneficiaries of this new 'made in the UK' initiative. Other heritage models from the IAG stable – including Wharfedale, Leak and Castle products – are set to follow, reversing a trend wherein the production of Mission, along with other brands including Audiolab and Quad, was moved to Asia to reduce costs and allow competitive price-points to be achieved. To that end, IAG has expanded its existing office and R&D facilities in Huntingdon, adding a new 9000sq ft production space, including a new anechoic chamber for speaker measurement, bringing its total footprint to some 25,000sq ft, 'to enable the manufacture of specific products to be brought back to the UK without skyrocketing costs'.

That's quite a boost for the idea of 'made in Britain' hi-fi, which is showing every

sign of not just weathering the storm of the past couple of years, but thriving. In a recent interview, Rega Research founder Roy Gandy reports that his company – perhaps best known for its turntables but with a much wider reach than that – has achieved huge increases in production and turnover year-on-year and continues to outgrow every increase in space it makes. It added an extra facility to its existing factory but that's already full, so it's now looking for a further expansion

of premises to allow for more storage and manufacturing. Gandy did sound a note of caution, saying: 'We're already at the biggest I think any British company has ever been without going broke, so we decided that if we're growing now, we've got to be careful, so we can retract if times change.' However, with some 6000 products a month being produced, of which 4000-5000 are turntables, there's little sign of that at the moment.

Despite recent problems of component supply and staffing shortages, other British names are also doing well, with full order books and – regretfully – back-orders on many popular products, simply because they can't make them fast enough. But they're not alone in that: enquiring recently about a new car from a major British manufacturer, I was informed that there were lead times of between six months and a year before I could expect



delivery, to the extent that the price of the few remaining 'nearly new' models was also skyrocketing due to the demand. The days when 'ex-demonstrator' meant a bargain are gone for now; retailers are hanging on to the stock they have in the hopes of building up their order books.

The same woes have also seen some hi-fi manufacturers apparently putting on hold the announcement of new models while they strive to fulfil current orders. Those who have launched are enjoying some success, though: the majority of the 'bread and butter' Bowers & Wilkins speaker models may be made in the company's Chinese production facilities – not that there's anything wrong with that, given the quality of the results, and indeed those achieved by IAG in the speakers it makes there – but the famous Worthing factory continues to turn out the excellent 800 D4 flagship series, as it always has. Oh, and if you want a pair, it will also handcraft you the still-radical Nautilus speakers, built to order for just shy of £60,000.

Add in the large number of smaller boutique hi-fi companies around the country, making everything from main hi-fi components to essentials such as cables, and it's clear that there's still a cachet to the 'made in the UK' label – and one the British hi-fi industry, even if parts of it are now owned elsewhere, is well placed to exploit. **G**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Audiolab Omnia

The name says it all – this new arrival from the IAG stable is a do-everything system to which one only needs add speakers. Has it got what it takes to succeed?



AUDIOLAB OMNIA

Type Network audio system

Price £1599

Streaming DTS Play-Fi from network audio stores, and online services including Amazon Music, Qobuz, Spotify, Tidal, and TuneIn radio

Networking Ethernet, Wi-Fi

Digital inputs Two coaxial, two optical, USB-A for storage and USB-B for computer, Bluetooth with aptX

Analogue inputs Moving magnet phono, three line

Digital outputs Coaxial, optical

Analogue outputs One pair of speakers, headphones, pre-out

Output power 50W per channel

Accessories supplied Wi-Fi and Bluetooth antennae, remote handset

Finishes Black or silver

Dimensions (W×H×D) 44×15.6×32.7cm

audiolab.co.uk

Whether it's a desire to downsize or simplify, without compromising on sound quality, the all-in-one system, requiring the buyer simply to add on a pair of speakers, has become quite a thing in recent times. The latest arrivals are a long way from the mini-systems of the past – not that there weren't some very good examples of that type, the latest versions of some of which survive even today – but the aim of the more recent arrivals has been somewhat loftier: to make 'serious' hi-fi both easy to use and capable of a wide range of functions way beyond the basic 'CD player plus receiver' of those little set-ups, while still having the wherewithal to drive a wide range of loudspeakers.

The one-box system idea is firmly established, from the Naim Uniti range – now well into its second generation – to the excellent Cambridge Audio Evo models, not to mention the very fine Marantz Model 40n 'system in an amplifier' featured in these pages in May. Now we have the latest contender, carrying a long-established British hi-fi name – Audiolab – and coming from a stable encompassing brands as diverse as Castle, Leak, Mission and Quad. Indeed, the Audiolab Omnia, available in a choice of silver and black anodised aluminium finishes at £1599,

distils many of its parent company's core competences into a remarkably comprehensive system able to meet the needs of many a music lover, as well as drawing on the brand's designs past and present, which include amplification, CD players and network music products.

Thus the new model has not only high-resolution playback of both online and network-stored music but also a built-in tray-loading CD drive and a moving magnet phono stage for the connection of a turntable, allowing it to form a neat bridge between physical media – in the form of LPs and CDs – and the widely adopted streaming music world. At the price, there's little to challenge it on this all-round capability: you either must spend considerably more to find a system so equipped or start adding on extra boxes to bring all this functionality, which rather goes against the idea of compactness and integrated operation.

Mind you, if you want to incorporate elements of an existing system, the Omnia can handle that, too. As well as its streaming capability, served by both Ethernet and Wi-Fi connectivity, and Bluetooth for instant streaming from mobile devices, it also has inputs for a wide range of add-ons. These include USB ports for both storage devices and music-

playing computers, four digital inputs – two optical and two coaxial – and three line-level analogue inputs in addition to its phono stage. Additionally, as well as a set of speaker outputs fed by the 50W-per-channel Class AB amplification within the Omnia, there are also pre-outs to feed an external amplifier or active speakers, and a headphone socket driven by its own amplifier stage, designed to drive a wide range of headphone types for personal listening. In other words, it may be a 'just add speakers' system but it also has more wide-ranging capabilities.

It's worth dwelling for a moment on the internal 'main' amplification here, for rather than following the common path of using Class D amplifier technology for its space efficiency and cool operation, the Audiolab engineers have opted for 'traditional' Class AB simply on the grounds of sound quality. While I wouldn't quite agree with their view that Class D 'can sound somewhat hard and sterile' – I've heard some very good-sounding amplifiers of this kind – it's clear that they've put in the work here: the pre-amp and power amp sections use short signal paths; the power amp uses complementary feedback topology for linearity and thermal stability; there's a hefty 200VA transformer and generous reservoir capacity to ensure

SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The Audiolab Omnia is a highly capable all-in-one system. Make more of it with these ...

WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 12.3 LOUDSPEAKERS

Wharfedale's Diamond 12.3 speakers are both easy to drive and fine-sounding, making them a great partner for the Omnia.



PRO-JECT DEBUT CARBON EVO TURNTABLE

The phono stage in the Omnia will support a wide range of high-quality turntables, such as this Pro-ject Debut Carbon Evo.



real-world speaker-driving capability; and even the volume control takes a purist approach. While the easy solution is to adjust the volume digitally, especially in a product in which digital audio plays so great a part, here the control is all-analogue, under microprocessor control.

There are many ways to enable streaming, and in the case of the Omnia this capability is provided by DTS Play-Fi, developed by the company perhaps best known for its surround audio systems for cinemas and home AV systems. Its streaming technology is widely supported by various audio companies, opening up the possibility of using the Omnia in a mixed-brand multiroom system, and is capable of streaming audio at up to 192kHz/24bit over Wi-Fi or wired Ethernet. Other systems may handle more extreme file formats but the Omnia's capability should be more than sufficient for most users.

Play-Fi is controlled via a free app, available for Apple iOS, Android and Kindle Fire devices, as well as Windows PCs, and can deliver streaming services including internet radio and music from DLNA-compliant libraries stored on the home network on NAS devices and computers. In addition, the Bluetooth 5

implementation here can stream direct from suitable devices in formats including aptX and aptX Low Latency, and the Omnia is also Roon certified, allowing it to be accessed via systems running that software. The app also allows the user to assign presets to access playlists and favourite radio stations, and you can even control the Omnia with voice instructions via any Amazon Alexa device.

PERFORMANCE

In other words, this is an exceptionally comprehensive music system, whether you want the 'plug and play' appeal of simply connecting it to a pair of speakers as a complete music system or to upgrade an existing set-up by adding streaming capability. It will serve both situations very well, working convincingly with high-quality compact speakers – think IAG's Castle, Mission or Wharfedale ranges, or perhaps the smaller Bowers & Wilkins 600 S2 Anniversary models – but also well up to the task of driving much larger speakers if you want to fill larger spaces with music. The quoted output power may seem modest on paper, but that high-quality output stage and generous power supply come into their own in the

system's ability to drive hard for large-scale orchestral works while still providing excellent levels of detail and maintaining reserves to handle the dynamics of music.

What's more, the various sections of the Omnia show the same levels of ability – this is much more than a 'streaming system with benefits'. The phono stage sounds clean and detailed with sensibly priced turntables, such as the more keenly pitched Pro-ject and Rega models; the CD player shows the company's depth of experience in this area; and the overall sound is rich and generous while at the same time delivering fine insight into a wide range of recordings. From Mitsuko Uchida's dazzling *Diabelli* Variations (Decca, 5/22), which shows the Omnia's control, fluidity, speed and dynamic ability, to the way this compact unit can drive big speakers convincingly with the big, warm sound of the Sinfonia of London/John Wilson recordings of Ravel orchestral works (Chandos, 3/22), the Audiolab is never less than entirely convincing, even if it lacks the absolute power and effortlessness of the rather more expensive Cambridge Audio Evo 150, with its much higher output. By any standards this is a very well-sorted and considered system, and deserves to do very well indeed. **G**

Or you could try ...

The Omnia joins a fast-growing market, meaning there's plenty of choice when it comes to one-box systems to which you only need add a pair of speakers.

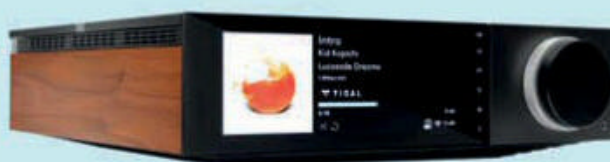
NaimUniti



Naim's Uniti range was an early example of the genre, with the original NaimUniti appearing more than a decade ago, in 2009. The current Uniti Star is perhaps the closest in specification to the Omnia, with a built-in CD player also able to rip music to attached or network storage and 70W-per-channel output. However, you'll need to add a phono stage to play records through this premium-price system, which also plays

very high-resolution music. Find out more at naimaudio.com.

Cambridge Audio Evo



Like Audiolab, Cambridge Audio is a relatively recent arrival in the one-box system arena, but it's made its mark with the slick-looking Evo models, complete with interchangeable side-panels to match your decor. There's no CD playback here – an add-on player is an option – but you do get superb streaming, plenty of power and a very good phono input on the more expensive of the two models, the excellent Evo 150. See cambridgeaudio.com for full details.

Marantz Model 40n



The Marantz Model 40n takes a different approach to the whole streaming system thing. It's an integrated amplifier with a full network audio implementation built in, as well as an excellent phono stage for your turntable and a range of inputs for extra source components, such as a CD player if you need one. Network playback is slick thanks to the built-in HEOS system, which also allows multiroom audio with a range of Marantz and Denon amplifiers, receivers and speakers. For further information, see marantz.com.

ORANGES & LEMONS

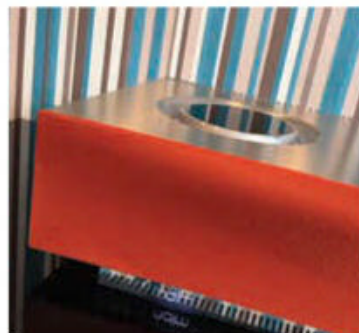
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● THE GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ...

First turntables

Whether you're reviving an old collection or starting to play second-hand finds, there are excellent buys for those wanting to get back into enjoying vinyl



The news that Audio-Technica, one of the best-known names in the manufacture of phono cartridges, is celebrating its 60th anniversary has emphasised the long legacy of music on vinyl LPs. Even in the age of digital downloads and streaming, there's still plenty of interest in playing records – and no shortage of equipment on which to do so. What's more, with the first LPs dating back to the late 1940s, there are plenty of collectible records lurking in old collections, and just occasionally used bargains to be found – even though sought-after releases, such as early discs from labels such as Decca, DG, EMI/HMV and Philips, now tend to attract high prices.

So what do you need to bring vinyl to your listening collection? Well, the obvious answer is a turntable, and the good news is that there are some very fine models available for affordable prices, provided you look beyond the hordes of 'retro' designs of sometimes dubious quality aimed at those more interested in having a player able to spin 'vinyls' as part of a lifestyle statement. Those models designed to look like vintage players are often made down to a price, and have been known to damage records through poor styli running at high tracking weights to improve 'playability', so are best avoided.

Fortunately, there's a whole industry making high-quality entry-level turntables offering both fine sound quality and sound engineering, and the market-leader, certainly in terms of the sheer number of turntables sold, is Austrian-based Pro-Ject, which revived turntable manufacturing back in the 1990s, putting itself well ahead of what's describe as the 'vinyl revival'. It now has a wide range of designs in its catalogue but the £179 Pro-Ject Primary E **1** remains faithful to its original design, and sets out the company's stall with its 'plug and play' claim. The beauty of the Primary E is that, like many Pro-Ject designs, it comes with all the fiddle-factor of turntable set-up done for you. It arrives

with a pickup cartridge – a rather good OM model from Ortofon – pre-installed in its arm, with alignment and tracking force already set, meaning that all the buyer needs do is install the drive-belt and platter, plug in to the mains and amplifier, and then sit back and enjoy their first record. Yes, you'll need an amplifier with a phono stage to pre-amplify the very low-level signals delivered by the cartridge – typically in single figures of millivolts rather than the nominal 2V of 'line-level' components such as CD players – but Pro-Ject has that covered too: buy the £269 Primary E Phono version, and you get a turntable with an onboard phono stage, able to plug into any 'aux' or other line input.

Beyond that entry-level model, the company offers a huge range of turntables of many different designs, offering facilities such as automatic arm-lift at the end of an LP side, and going right up to the flagship Signature 12, a 34kg monster starting from just under £8000. It also has a range of designs complete with USB output, fed from an internal digital-to-analogue stage, enabling records to be archived to a computer.

But Pro-Ject isn't the only name in the affordable turntable market. British company Rega Research has long offered its value-for-money Planar designs, all

made in its British factory, and the latest Planar 1 (£299) **2** offers a similar package to Pro-Ject's, complete with a pre-installed, pre-aligned Rega Carbon cartridge in its handmade EB110 arm, all ready to play. You can even get a version complete with built-in phono stage, the Planar 1 Plus **3** at £385. In fact, Rega can take things even further with the availability of its System One (£1200), combining the Planar 1 with its io amplifier and Kyte loudspeakers to form an excellent 'plug and play' analogue audio set-up; it even comes with all the cables required for easy set-up and use.





















Audio-Technica, which is where we started, has just announced a new version of its own high-value turntable for these setting out on the vinyl journey, or resuming the voyage. The £290 AT-LPW30BK **4** has a built-in phono pre-amplifier and comes pre-fitted with one of the company's classic phono cartridges, the AT-VM95C, which can later be upgraded with the fitment of even higher-quality styli from the company's range. Meanwhile there are similar offerings from other well-known names, including Dual, with its CS range starting from £299 for the CS 440 complete with a pre-aligned Audio-Technica AT-91 cartridge and an auto-stop arm-lift mechanism, while the starter model from another celebrated brand, Thorens, comes in at £550, again with a pre-fitted Audio-Technica.

Beyond that, the sky's the limit when it comes to analogue replay equipment, with the current version of one of the all-time classic turntables, the Scottish-built Linn Sondek LP12, starting from £2015 – though that only gets you the motor unit, with no arm or cartridge: add the entry-level arm and cartridge package to create the Majik LP12 and the price rises to £3450, while a 'full-house' Klimax LP12 **5** with all the top-level Linn enhancements is now a heady £23,296. That's by no means the most you can spend on a turntable, but if you're just rediscovering vinyl, that's for another day. For now, the entry-level models above will serve you very well. **G**



Audio-Technica founder Hideo Matsushita in the early 1960s experimenting with vinyl playback

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Shobana Jeyasingh

The choreographer on composer collaborations and her desire to cast a new light on old music

I trained in Indian classical dance from when I was very young and grew up listening to Indian classical music. But when I went to boarding school in Sri Lanka, I heard my first piece of Western classical music – *The Blue Danube*. It was a very colonial school, so we'd learn English folk songs – *As I Was Going to Strawberry Fair*, *The Lass of Richmond Hill* ... We were all expected to take piano lessons, but I wasn't very good. Indian music isn't notated, you memorise the phrases – so that's what I did on the piano, too. I stopped looking at the black dots, so when my teacher would say, 'Play from here?' I'd say, 'Can't I just start again from the beginning?'

When I was living in Edinburgh for my Masters, I shared a flat with someone who built his own harpsichord. The piece I heard every day for a year was Louis Couperin's Chaconne in D minor (*La Complainante*), and I grew to love it. When I created *Strange Blooms* (2013) based on the cellular life of plants, I revisited that piece; Gabriel Prokofiev used electroacoustic and remix techniques to create an amazing new work (even though every note was from the harpsichord).

Whenever I work with a composer, they will come to my studio – they need to be in sympathy with my decisions and respect the dramaturgy of the dance. I'm not saying I want to control every note, but we have to agree on the general overarching narrative of the music. Even Michael Nyman came to the studio when we were working on *Configurations* (1989). That was the first time I'd worked with a composer, and I had to be very prescriptive because I was working with Indian classical dancers. I composed the whole rhythmical structure myself first, and I was amazed when I heard it translated into his String Quartet No 2.

I first heard Monteverdi's *Il combattimento di Clorinda et Tancredi* 20 years ago and was struck by how he used the voice in such a distinctive way. Over lockdown, I had time to read the whole poem on which it is based – *Jerusalem Liberated* – and I found Tasso's depiction of the Crusades humanistic and non-polarising. I also found it fascinating that, by the end, the sympathies of the narrator, Testo, are with Clorinda. The common view is that Clorinda and Tancredi were lovers, he kills her by mistake, and she converts to Christianity so that she can join him in death. But when you read the poem, you realise that's all wrong! The tragedy is only on Tancredi's part. He is head-over-heels in love with Clorinda – to the extent that he can't fight. And she converts to Christianity because she was born a Christian princess but raised a Muslim, so at the moment of her death she wants to return to the religion of her birth.

For the first half of my new work, *Clorinda Agonistes*, I haven't messed around with Monteverdi's music at all – it will be played by harpsichord, chittarone and string quartet, and the tenor Ed Lyons will sing the parts of Testo and also the two



THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

Purcell King Arthur – 'What Power art thou?'

Scholl; Accademia Bizantina / Montanari Decca

For *In Flagrante*, my work about cell division, I used this recording (in remixed form). The drama of every cell as it divides is also present in this powerful music.

protagonists. Ed will get physically involved too – the story is told as much by the dance as by the words and the music. For the second half, I wanted to bring Clorinda to the 21st century. What would she be like? Would she be fighting in Beirut? She's represented by four dancers and a singer (a recording of the Syrian mezzo-soprano Dima Orsho singing Tasso's text in Arabic). I was introduced to Kareem Roustom through Venice's Fondazione Cini and loved his music straight away. We had lots of meetings early on during which we agreed on the instrumentation (string quartet and two voices) and the idea of incorporating Dabke, the Middle Eastern social dance.

I've been listening to a lot of recordings of the Monteverdi. Although he doesn't sing it in a Baroque style, Rolando Villazón is, I find, incredibly emotional and dramatic. In one of the most important stanzas in Tasso's poem, the narrator addresses Night ('Notte') and acknowledges that what Clorinda and Tancredi are doing deserves a big stage, with audience and lights – in other words, he wants it to be a piece of theatre. In this sense, the way Villazón sings it is logical – he's bringing out the theatricality of it all. **G**

'Clorinda Agonistes (Clorinda the Warrior)' is premiered by Shobana Jeyasingh Dance at this year's 'Dance@TheGrange' on July 13 and 14; for information, visit the-grangefestival.co.uk

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